MARVEL Age

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Exclusive X-Men/Avengers Crossover Poster

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Believe it or not, we're already living in 1994.

By the time you read this, late in August, all of the editors here at Marvel are deeply involved in making plans for the comics you'll see during the first third of the coming year. These ideas come from many sources, particularly the writers and artists who are intimately involved in guiding the destinies of Marvel's many characters. The ideas become proposals, the proposals become plots, and the plots take tangible shape to become comics.

One reason we're so far ahead of the game is that we have to let the comic book store owners know what *they* can expect, so that they can plan ahead what comics they will be stocking for you, the readers.

Thus, we're travelling on down the time stream, and we've already arrived in the future.

As of the New Year, we want to find new ways to inject even more vitality into MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE. To that end, we will be polling all of our sources of advice and ideas: editors, writers, folks in the many departments here at Marvel Comics. And you.

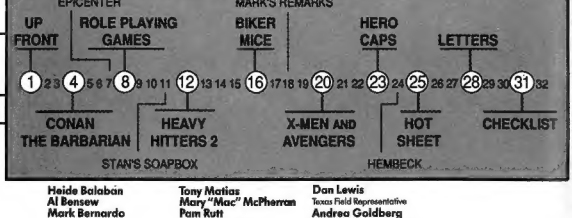
Since everything we do is ultimately for you, the reader, no one is better equipped than *you* to tell us what belongs in our pages. Over the coming months you will find another Official Marvel Age Poll among these pages, but why wait. As soon as you finish reading this scintillating issue, sit down with pen in hand and start the flow of ideas. As we begin to collate your responses, we'll incorporate as many of those ideas as possible into our plans.

Then the plans will become story assignments, the assignments will become outlines, the outlines will become articles, and the articles will take tangible shape to become MARVEL AGE.

It's our spin on the creative process, and it starts with you.

In the meanwhile, be sure to enjoy and appreciate our *Avengers/X-Men Anniversary Poster* in the middle of this issue, by Liam (DEATH'S HEAD, BLOODSEED) Sharp, Mark (EXCALIBUR, CLANDESTINE) Farmer, and Renée (MARVEL AGE) Witterstaetter. The fun doesn't stop here — next issue you can look for *part two* of the mega-poster, along with some more special surprises.

— Steve Saffel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Up Front

Venomous Anniversary

Fresh from a radical costume change and caught in the midst of his catastrophic "Fall from Grace" storyline, the Man Without Fear will face a grudge match with Venom, the villain Daredevil helped to create. This deadly encounter is slated for DAREDEVIL #323, on sale the first week of October, written by D.G. Chichester and penciled by Scott McDaniel.

Then, in issue #324, Daredevil and the vampire Morbius come to blows as they vie for possession of the biological weapon known as the Psi-Virus — a weapon also sought by Kingpin and the Hand. And, according to Editor Ralph Macchio, issue #325, which marks DAREDEVIL's 30th anniversary, the transformation of the sightless hero will be accelerated by the re-appearance of a startling figure from DAREDEVIL history, one who will play a pivotal role in this future. Macchio commented, "Someone from his past is going to help shake things up a bit — someone [who] everyone seems to have an emotional attachment to, including Matt Murdock himself. This person will be jumping off a mountain and back into his life, and will become more or less a partner for him to play off."

"Fall from Grace," running from DAREDEVIL #319-325, chronicles the trials Matt Murdock faces when he is forced to completely destroy and reconstruct both his civilian and heroic identities.

Specialty Covers: To Be Or Not To Be

Fans who don't want to buy a comic with a specialty cover can now buy the same comic without it. From August through October, Marvel is conducting an experiment: several books that are scheduled to have foil, embossing, die-cutting or special ink on their covers will also be made available without them. So if fans don't want to spend the extra money for a specialty cover, they don't have to.

Sven Larsen, the head of marketing for Marvel explained, "The majority of fans like specialty covers but an increasingly vocal minority have said that they just want the stories. That's why we're trying out this new two-tiered approach." If at the end of October fan response is good, this may become common practice with all specialty covered books. "We've always said that the real people who control our titles are the fans," Sven said. "Whatever they decide is what we'll do."

Three of the first comics to participate in the dual cover experiment, all on sale in August, are: NEW WARRIORS #40, DAREDEVIL #321, TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION II #1.

Photo by Justin Niebel

The Marvel Scholarship

Thanks to Marvel President Terry Stewart, some lucky student at the Joe Kubert School of Cartoon Art will be the recipient of a new, full Marvel Comics scholarship. The scholarship came about one afternoon last May while Stewart was visiting the school. "Terry was up here touring the school and learning about our approach," said Kubert School founder Joe Kubert. "About two hours into it he turned to me and said, 'We've *got* to do it.' My mouth dropped to the floor." The scholarship Terry proposed will grant a total of $24,000 for three years' tuition, and an intership at Marvel Comics. The winner will be chosen from each year's new class based upon the quality of their artwork and extent of their need.

The Kubert School located in Dover, New Jersey, was founded in 1976 by comics legend Joe Kubert, who still runs it to this day. With a curriculum focused on comic and cartoon art, it is the only school of its type in the world. Alumni include Joe's sons Andy (X-MEN) and Adam (WOLVERINE), Tim Truman (WILD CARDS, *Scout*), Ron Wagner (MORBIUS), Lee Weeks (DAREDEVIL, GAMBIT) and newcomer Matt Ryan (X-MEN), who Joe promises fans will be hearing a lot more of. In addition, nearly half of the people in Marvel's production department (the Bullpen) are "Kubie" grads.

Getting into the school isn't easy. Each year only 110 students are selected from more than 600 applicants. Aspiring artists submit a portfolio of their work, which must meet the school's strict entrance standards. Once accepted, students must still cover the $8000 a year expense. "Our students come literally from all over the world," Joe said, "and none of them covers the expense easily. That's why I think this scholarship is so great. I couldn't be happier!"

Poster Postings

Four new Marvel press posters will go on sale in September. The Avengers 30th Anniversary poster by George Perez and Tom Smith features *every* hero who's ever been an Avenger as well as every costume the Wasp has ever worn. Darrick Robertson, Larry Mahlstedt and Moose Bauman have created a moody New Warriors poster depicting the new team line-up. A bikini-clad Storm is the subject of the poster by Mark Silvestri, which was originally printed as the cover to last year's MARVEL SWIMSUIT SPECIAL. Finally, the poster by Mark Beechum is a gritty, realistic, painted piece of a ferocious Wolverine. All posters will sell for $4.95.

What's So Special About Nova?

According to Editor Rob Tokar, who has just added the new, ongoing NOVA series to his stable, the appeal of the giant-sized, November premiere issue, written by Fabian Nicieza (X-MEN, X-FORCE, CABLE) and penciled by Chris Marrinan (DR. STRANGE, WEB OF SPIDER-MAN) is that Nova is just a regular guy.

"Take away his powers and he's got nothing," Rob explained. "Reed Richards would still be a genius without his, Ben Grimm a star football player and Johnny Storm a race car driver. Richard Ryder (Nova) is a high school dropout: he's not rich, powerful, smart — he's not even psychotic. He's not bad at anything, but he's not great either. I think a lot of people can identify with him."

In the first issue, Nova gets a new costume and augmented powers. The issue will be available with a gold foil cover and without it. "You don't have to be a NEW WARRIORS fan to enjoy what this book's about," Tokar concluded, "It's simply about how a real normal person learns to deal with super powers."

Red Mist 2020

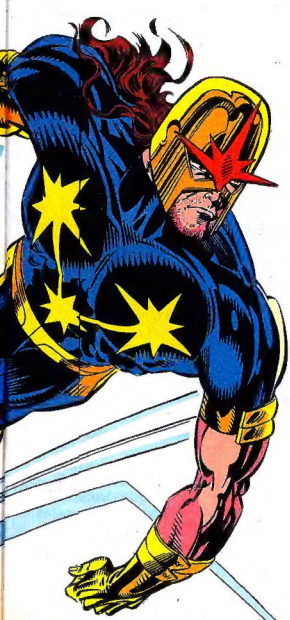
Three brand-new Marvel UK series: DEATH DUTY, 'ROIDRAGE, and BLOODRUSH, will debut in October in a tautly interwoven saga carrying the umbrella title "Red Mist 2020."

The Red Mist is a virus that has been inadvertently induced in subjects taking part in the government super soldier programs. The story kicks off in DEATH DUTY, a new ongoing series featuring a SHIELD-operated cyborg troop in the year 2020 that discovers they have been infected by the Red Mist, and it's affecting the nonbiological parts of their anatomy. DEATH DUTY is written by Alan Cowsill and Simon Jowett, with art by Andrew Currie, who will pencil all three of the titles for the duration of the crossover.

The source of the Red Mist will be revealed in 'ROIDRAGE, a four-issue monthly series written by Alan Cowsill, set in the present day. An organization known as MERCY has developed super soldiers, and the Red Mist introduced in the process causes the soldiers to go into a violent state known as 'roidrage before it kills them. The only survivor from the MERCY squad is the super soldier known as Reno. "Red Mist 2020" runs thorugh 'ROIDRAGE #1 and #2.

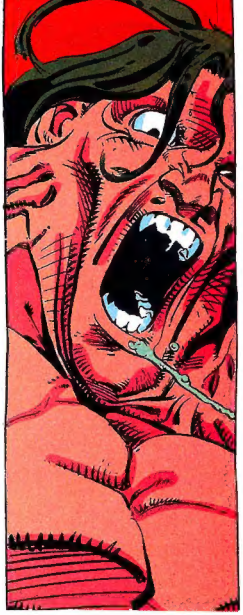
Then, in BLOODRUSH (written by Simon Jowett), a bitter 2020 detective named Jake Keller is drawn into an investigation of the Red Mist syndrome in relation to the Death Duty combat unit. "Red Mist 2020" will once again be featured in the first two issues of this four-issue limited series.

All three make their debut in October. WILD THING #8-10 and SUPER SOLDIERS #9-10 will also feature peripheral tie-ins with "Red Mist 2020."



"RED MIST" CROSSOVER GUIDE:

WILD THING #8*
DEATH DUTY #1
'ROIDRAGE #1
BLOODRUSH #1
WILD THING #9*
SUPER SOLDIERS #9*
DEATH DUTY #2
'ROIDRAGE #2
BLOODRUSH #2
WILD THING #10*
SUPER SOLDIERS #10*
(* — Red Mist "touchdowns")



Finger On The Pulse

- The first 2099 crossover, "Fall of the Hammer," kicks off in December in SPIDER-MAN 2099 #16.
- FORCE WORKS is the title of the new monthly series spinning off in December following the final issue of AVENGERS WEST COAST.
- Annex, a character who debuted in this year's AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL, gets his own limited series in early 1994 written by Jack C. Harris and penciled by Walter McDaniel.
- PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL #61 is part 1 of, "Suicide Run," a nine-part crossover that results in a major change in the Punisher status quo.
- WAR MACHINE #1, premiering in January 1994, will be penciled by talented newcomer Gabriel Gecko.
- The long-rumored GHOST RIDER 2099 will become a reality in mid-1994.
- A Shroud four-part limited series written by Michael Barr and penciled by M.C. Wyman is tentatively scheduled for Winter 1993-1994.
- In December, NIGHTSTALKERS #16 will feature the return of a major villain.

Conan

multi-media CONQUEROR

In an unprecedented explosion of activity, the world of ***Conan the Barbarian*** *is bursting out on all fronts, from television to the comics. In the search for someone to cover all of the action,* ***Marvel Age*** *recruited the one person who has to keep track of the changes on all the Hyborian fronts — Conan Editor Richard Ashford:*

Sherlock Holmes fought London's criminals last century. Tarzan clocked in at the beginning of the millennium, Flash Gordon in the twenties, Superman in the thirties, James Bond in the fifties — Spider-Man and the X-Men have been around for more than a quarter of a century. Given this incredible tendency for endurance, and the "legendary" status these literary icons achieved, it isn't surprising that Conan's own origins extend back more than 50 years — to December 1932, to be exact. He first appeared in *Weird Tales*, a publication which he not only out-grew but vastly out-lived.

What links so many great characters is the literary lodestone the writers tapped into to develop unique, original, and ever engaging creations that stand the test of time *and* the test of readers. When he created Conan, Robert E. Howard did not just create a character, he created a whole world in which his character could stride through in one high adventure after another. He did not create a narrow timeline around which his character and stories endlessly revolve. Instead he created a life that his character, through other writers, could follow even after Howard's tragic death in 1936.

And for Conan the future is brighter than ever.

THE NOVELS

In addition to Conan's original adventures, chronicled by Howard with contributions by L. Sprague De Camp, Lin Carter, and Bjorn Nyberg, and kept in print by Ace Books, new stories are being added each year by Tor Books. To date they have published 28 adventures by a variety of authors including Leonard Carpenter, John Maddox Roberts, Steve Perry and Ronald J. Green. Robert Jordan serves as line editor for these additions to the bizarre Hyborean legend. New volumes are appearing all the time, with the next one due in November under the title *Conan and the Treasure of Python.*

MOVIES

It has been more than a decade since the *Conan* movies hacked their way across the silver screen, as Conan brought new dimensions to the budding film career of Arnold Schwarzenegger. There is little

doubt among those who own the rights to Conan (under the umbrella of Conan Properties) that there will be a third Conan movie. At this moment, however, it seems unlikely that Schwarzenegger will be the one to don the furry loincloth. Universal, who released the first two Conan movies, must soon determine whether or not they want to produce another. If they pass on the rights for the next Conan movie, there are a number of studios vying to bring the Cimmerian to the screen again.

Even if they yield the rights to Conan, Universal still holds the rights to King Kull, another Howard barbarian creation that actually *pre-dated* Conan. Many of Howard's fantasy creations have at one time or another been optioned for the movies, including Solomon Kane, the danger-seeking Puritan adventurer. Set in the 16th century, his adventures are visually among the most interesting of Howard's many creations, and lend themselves well to a movie treatment.

. . .there are a number of studios vying to bring the Cimmerian to the screen again.

THE ANIMATED SERIES

Currently airing is the *Conan* animation series, which thus far has included thirteen half-hour syndicated episodes, and 55 more episodes are to premiere this fall, produced by Sunbrow Productions, the people responsible for *GI Joe*. The bible for the series was written by Christy Marx, who has herself written tales of Red Sonja — the she-devil with a sword who shares the Hyborian world that Conan roams.

Adapting the core of Conan to the small screen was no easy task. The first episode, "Night of the Fiery Tears," set the background for the series, beginning when a meteor shower rained a magical star metal upon an eighteen year old Conan and his village in Cimmeria. From a piece of this metal, Conan's father forged Conan an all powerful sword. While Conan was away from the village, the evil snake-man Wrath-Amon invaded the village seeking the metal that he knew could destroy him. When Conan's father refused to turn over the star metal, Wrath-Amon unleashed his terrible sorcery. Conan returned to find his parents turned to stone, and vowed to search the land for Wrath -Amon to force him to return his parents to normal.

Conan was joined by seven companions: Thunder, his gigantic black stallion; Needle, a tiny Phoenix with a sharp wit; Jezmine, an athletic 17 year old beauty; Zula, a black warrior-prince; Greywolf, a white wizard with his two hounds, Sasha and Misha; Falkenar, one of the Falconer's of Kusan and an excellent archer; and Snagg, a burly, red-haired **seafarer.** The series launched a line of toys in its wake and has generated a lot of interest among younger audiences.

HYBORIAN TOYS

Hasbro has invested a lot of time and resources into developing the Conan toy line, based on the show's many characters. The toy company, which was responsible for the development of *G.I. Joe*, hopes Conan and his companions will be the hit of '93 and '94. Launched at this year's Toy Fair, the line is anticipated to be particularly popular among the Christmas shoppers.

THE LIVE SHOW

Those who would prefer to see Conan in the flesh need only visit the Universal Studios theme park in Los Angeles, which hosts two million visitors each year. The live Conan show is one of the most popular events at the theme park — a mixture of theatrics and pyrotechnics which has been thrilling audiences for some time now. A behind the scenes look at the event is slated for an upcoming issue of SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN.

And as for the comic books adventures. . .

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

Marvel's flagship barbarian title will be canceled with issue #275 in order to focus the ongoing adventure in SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN (SSOC). The final issue spectacular will sport a fully painted cover by Colin MacNeil and 55 page story penciled by Mike Docherty and inked by three of the most famous Conan embellishers: Ricardo Villagran, Ernie Chan, and Alfredo Alcala. The story, written by Roy Thomas, the man responsible for bringing Conan to the comic book world and charting the majority of Conan's Marvel career, brings Conan and his traveling partner, Isparana, into violent conflict over her demon-spawned child to be. It will also introduce the Kozaks and prove to be a turning point in Conan's life.

The chronology will be picked up in SSOC as Conan sets up and leads the Free Companions, merging them with the horse-mounted Kozaks. From this position of strength he begins to harass the Turanian Empire in a number of skirmishes that build to a bloody crescendo, resulting in the massacre of Conan's forces.

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN

Rafael Kayanan, who dazzled readers with his adaptations of Michael Moorcock's fantasy creation Hawkmoon, has joined the Conan creative team. Kayanan is just completing his and Roy Thomas's adaptation of the Tor novel *Conan and the Gods of the Mountain*, actually a sequel to the famous Howard adventure *Red Nails*, Rafael's favorite Howard comic adaptation. He was very enthusiastic to tackle this sequel. This will also mark Tim Conrad's dazzling return to the Conan foldwith his unique, earthy style. He has already completed two covers and is busy working a third, as well as a short comics story.

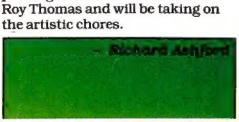
SSOC #216 features the return of Alfredo Alcala as both *penciler* and inker [for the first time in many years], illustrating a tale set in mystic Stygia, Howard's fictional equivalent of ancient Egypt. The tale is based on a short story, set in ancient Egypt, by Tennessee Williams, who later went on to write such classic American plays as *Street Car Named Desire, Glass Menagerie, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Night of the Iguana* and many others. Adapter Roy Thomas has woven references to much of Tennessee Williams's work into the story, which ironically originally appeared in *Weird Tales* a few years before Howard's first Conan story. The cover is by fines art illustrator Toni Taylor, whose favorite period of history just happens to be ancient Egypt.

The tale is based on a short story, set in ancient Egypt, by Tennessee Williams. . .

In SSOC #217-218, Spanish artist Estaban Maroto, new to the pages of SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN but *not* new to illustrating Conan, joins the creative team. Maroto, the man responsible for designing the metal bikini costume of Red Sonja, will be penciling and inking a two part adaptation of the novel CONAN THE MERCENARY. This is the only book in the Andrew Offutt Conan trilogy that has not been adapted in SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN. Maroto actually did the illustrations for the Ace novel back in 1980, so this will be familiar ground for him. He will be providing one of the covers — the other will be by Tim Conrad — and it is with this issue in which the continuity stemming from CONAN THE BARBARIAN starts.

Issues #219-220, mark the first meeting between Conan and Solomon Kane — despite the fact that the characters lived thousands of years apart. It will be penciled and inked by Scotland's own Colin MacNeil. Solomon Kane is his favorite Howard character, and MacNeil sent Roy Thomas a tape full of old Scottish roving songs to put him in the right creative mood for what is planned to be a kind of "Brigadoom" where Kane and Conan meet in a village out of time.

For SSOC #221-224, Conan travels to the Lost World of Arthur Conan Doyle where he is pitted against an array of dinosaurs and strange and exotic tribes in four stand-alone stories with a common setting — the lost plateau popularized in fiction by the creator of Sherlock Holmes, with spectacular dinosaur-populated covers by Sandy Plunkett, Doug Beekman, Vince Evans and Geoff Darrow. The sequence will be set following Howard's last story, *Conan of the Isles*, with Conan in his sixties. Jeff Johnson, best known for his work on Marvel's Wonder Man, is busy co-plotting the first installment with Roy Thomas and will be taking on the artistic chores.



EPICENTER

PSYCHONAUTS

The year — 2055 A. D. — an uninhabitable Earth sends millions of people scurrying to space cities far from Big Blue. But the same problems soon begin to plague those worlds as pollution, disease and political unrest take hold of their new "planets."

Six people gifted with "psychic powers of the mind" return to Earth in the hope of finding a healed or healing planet. What they find is a nightmarish place of dinosaurs (!), monsters and mutant humans. Worst of all, they "encounter" a mysterious dark shadow that roams the planet. Their mission: to discover what effect it holds over Earth and a means to defeat it. These are the PSYCHONAUTS.

A limited series shipping from Epic Comics in August, PSYCHONAUTS germinated back in 1989 and 1990 under the guiding hand of Marvel's then foreign liaison, Gene Pelc. Gene had an idea for Marvel to co-create a comic book with Japanese artists. It would be the first collaboration of its kind in history.

The story, a post-apocalyptic science fiction thriller, was developed by Marvel under the guidance of Editor-in-Chief, Tom DeFalco, in conjunction with British writers Alan Grant and Tony Luke. Script would be sent to highly popular Japanese artist Kobayashi Motofumi and translated for him, since he couldn't speak a word of English and no one on the American side spoke Japanese.

The project became a learning experience for everyone involved. PSYCHONAUTS will be published in two formats: in black and white in Japan, and in full color in America as a five-issue, 48-page bookshelf series.

Editor Nel Yomtov inherited the series in the fall of 1990, and the language barrier created some interesting dilemmas for him. For one, the Japanese method of storytelling needed to be addressed by artist Kobayashi, who had to rework his art to some extent, and by Nel, who had to change the layouts when it arrived. The Japanese read up and down, rather than from left to right, so the art must be very carefully designed for both formats. The use of grey washes on the black and white art also created certain restrictions for American colorists.

Eventually, through one means or another, Nel and the Japanese solved these problems, and created a book that many feel is well worth the waiting period. Full of horrible beasts, mystic power and a quest to recover a lost Earth, PSYCHONAUTS is a collaboration of international proportions, a sci-fi action adventure replete with giant dinosaurs, scary monsters and mutants.

STRANGE COMBAT TALES

War meets *The Twilight Zone* in a four-part limited series also hitting the stands this September. Writers Rob Stofega and Aubrey Singer take historical truths and add a mix of fantasy and science fiction under the guidance of Ace Editor Rob Tokar. Pencilled by Dave Matthews and inked by Alan Noonis:

- World War I soldiers face the most terrifying Nazi secret weapon — an army of the undead, raised by voodoo.
- An African-American female soldier from the future chases down an alien race from her time into the middle of the American Civil War.
- A cargo jet filled with Knights from the Crusades, lands on modern Earth where the medieval soldiers launch a mission with an archaeologist and a New York police lieutenant.

Each issue is 32 pages without ads, and filled with original science fiction tales tinged with terror, reminiscent of George Orwell and Philip K. Dick.

— *Paula Foye*

Role-Playing 101

Imagine.

Imagine calling the shots for Spider-Man. Imagine telling the X-Men how to defeat their latest mutant menace. Imagine existing in a world of magic and clashing blades. Imagine being a dragon-slaying hero (or heroine). Imagine being a *part* of the adventure.

Imagine no more. Welcome to the world of TSR and its role-playing games.

Very simply, a role-playing game (RPG) is a game where a player takes on the role of an imaginary individual in an imaginary setting: two parts game, two parts acting, and two parts tale-spinning. The player guides his or her imaginary individual (called a player-character) through a series of challenges or adventures created by another player (known as the Dragon Master or Judge). The player character "wins" the game by triumphing over these challenges. There is usually a group of players, all running different player characters, in a world created by a single Judge.

Like in the comic books, the characters grow over time. Just as Spider-Man is no longer the bespectacled high-school kid from all those years ago, player characters grow in experience and power through continuous adventures and challenges. Bob the Barbarian starts out as another guy with a sword, but can rise in ability until he becomes King Bob I, the mighty and powerful ruler of an empire.

Role-playing games are younger than comic books in that they only came about in the early 1970's. The great grandfather of these games remains Dungeons & Dragons, which has passed through a number of incarnations and versions from that day to this. Set in a fantasy universe filled with orcs, elves, treasure, magic, and (of course) dragons, D&D became a phenomenal success, reaching out to young people at high schools, colleges, and beyond, and putting TSR on the map (that location is the sunny vacation town of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin).

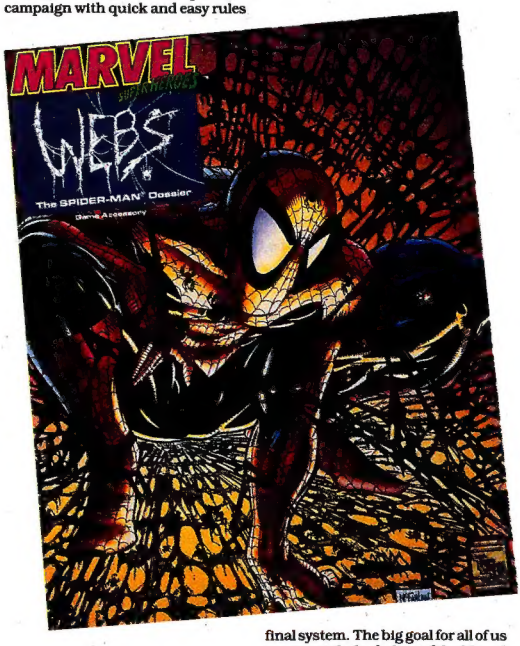
How does this fit in with Spider-Man?

Ten years ago or so, TSR and Marvel started talking seriously about expanding the world of role-playing beyond fantasy and into the Marvel Universe. A couple of other games had attempted to deal with super-powered characters, but none had yet taken on Marvel's ever-popular pantheon of super heroes and villains. Until TSR took up the challenge.

TSR assigned one of their rising young talents to the task (that would be yours truly, Jeff Grubb), with the charge to create a role-playing game that would not only capture the flavor and excitement of the Marvel Universe, but be easy to learn for people who have never experienced a role-playing game before. Little did TSR realize what it was asking for.

Back when I was in college, I created my own scratch-built super hero campaign with quick and easy rules to entertain my weekly D&D group. The campaign was set in the Marvel Universe, but in one of the more remote locations — West Lafayette, Indiana to be precise. Set up as the "Youth Franchise" of the Avengers (and predating the West Coast version of that group by a few years), the Midwestern "Junior Achievers," using such code names as the Crimson Ram, Carl the Firebreather, and Super-Pin (the Pro-Bowler of Steel) fought local evils and Marvel super villains that wandered into town. It was super hero role-playing designed with fun in mind. This prototype system was known in our little group as "Project: Marvel Comics," and years later, would form the basis for the *Marvel Super Heroes Role-Playing Game*.

Aided by editor/co-writer Steve Winter and fellow designer Bruce Nesmith, we plunged into the lore of the Marvel Universe. The original system was tested, modified, discarded, brought back, tweaked, and tested again. We went through (by my count) six different methods of recording character abilities and settling combat before coming to the final system. The big goal for all of us was to catch the feeling of the Marvel Universe: a campaign that ranges from human drama to galactic epic, and from personal tragedy to broad comedy.



The result was the *Basic Marvel Super Heroes Role-Playing Game*, publishing first in 1984 and revised and updated in 1991. It was created with the idea of expanding the world of role-playing into the world's greatest super-powered universe. In those early years, both Bruce Nesmith and myself labored hard, as recorders in the field of super-heroics, coming up with fair and playable abilities and statistics of the X-men, the Avengers, the Fantastic Four, the Pun-

isher, Thor, and Alpha Flight. We always presented ourselves as reporters whose beat was the Marvel Universe, and as the heroes changed over time, so would we.

That was ten years ago. Since then, *Marvel Super Heroes* has become the most popular and best-selling super hero role-playing game in the world, thanks in no small part to both the expertise of TSR and the ever-growing popularity of the Marvel Universe.

The *Marvel Super Heroes* line has always been a trendsetter for TSR, and we have used the line to experiment with new approaches. Things that are now fairly common in role-playing first appeared in Marvel products, including full-color maps and removable character sheets for the super heroes, incorporating data from the original OFFICIAL HANDBOOK of the Marvel Universe with game information into a handy, easy-to-use ring-binder format. These *Gamer's Guides to the Marvel Universe* remain among the most popular items in the line.

So where does one get started in role-playing? Depending on where your own interests lie, there are two excellent choices. The first is the time-honored *Basic Marvel Super Hero Role-Playing Game*, an excellent introduction to the world of role-playing in the Marvel Universe. If your tastes run towards fantasy, then the *Dragon Strike* game is highly recommended as an ideal introduction for first time role-players (see sidebar).

In the decade since its first appearance, the *Marvel Super Heroes Role-Playing Game* has visited with all the major players of the Marvel Universe, from the Avengers to the X-Men to Spider-Man. Most recently,

TSR has been working on a number of projects which show the depth and variety of super hero role-playing:

Webs: A boxed adventure set containing background information about everybody's favorite wall-crawler. Players soar above the Manhattan skyline in pursuits of Venom, Carnage, and the rest of Spidey's greatest foes.

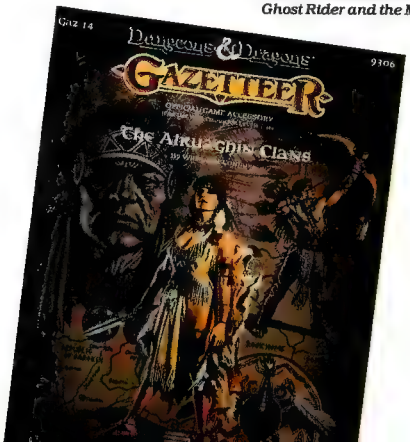
Avengers Archives: Another boxed set, this one telling the full tales of all the Avengers, past and present, and pitting them against the machinations of the Masters of Evil.

Ghost Rider and the Midnight Sons: This boxed adventure takes a look at the dark side of the Marvel Universe, and highlights such supernatural stars as Morbius, Terror, and Darkhold.

The Gamer's Handbook of the Marvel Universe — the 1993 update, seventh in its series. As mentioned above, this is how we've managed to stay on top of the Marvel Universe, recording the changes of its greatest heroes and introducing new foes who only recently appeared. This edition provides new details of the Avengers, the Invaders, Nomad, and the characters of Marvel 2099.

And for those who find the game their cup of tea, there is also an *Advanced Set for Marvel Super Heroes*, which include more abilities, foes, characters, and adventures for the dedicated gamer.

Throughout its time, the *Marvel Super Heroes Role-Playing Game* has always sought to bring out the best and most exciting parts of the Universe it is a part of, and to bring that excitement to the players of the game. So come along and explore the Marvel Universe with us. And bring your imagination.



Dawn of the Dragon Strike!

In a far and mystical land, the foul sorcerer Teraptus has brought darkness upon the world, stealing the light of the sun itself. It is up to a determined band of heroes, armed only with sword and spell and strong heart, to defeat the evil sorcerer and return life to the land.

Welcome to the world of *Dragon Strike*, TSR's newest and greatest introduction to adventure gaming, or as we call it, AdventureVision™ gaming. Designed by Bruce Nesmith, long-time *Marvel Super Heroes RPG* guru, and ably aided by co-writer Andria Hayday, the Dragon Strike game is the simplest and best introduction to role-playing, bar none.

Dragon Strike contains everything needed for a challenging and enjoyable adventure, run by one player known as the Dragon Master, and up to five of his friends. Each of these friends takes up the role of one of the heroes on the quest to destroy the malignant Sun Stone. Warrior, Thief, Wizard, or Elf, these heroes must work together to overcome great obstacles in order to complete their quest.

To help set up the adventure and explain role-playing, TSR has included a videotape to help players and DMs. More than just a video, the *Dragon Strike* tape is filmed in hyperReality™, a merging of enhanced film and computer animation. Directed by Hollywood veteran Flint Dille, the result is unlike anything seen before, and the video is just part of the adventure itself!

The game does not end with the video, of course; four separate maps lay out the settings for the adventures. Plastic miniature figures record the player's character's location — and those of their enemies. Orcs, man-scorpions, and the deadly dragon itself lie waiting in the dungeon ruins. Cards record weapons, spells, and characters in the play of the game, all laid out simply enough for the newest player to the game.

And, if all this is not enough, TSR and Marvel are teaming up to do a comic book for *Dragon Strike*. Due out in November, the Dragon Strike book details the adventures of the heroes before the tape begins. Master of modern fantasy Jeff Grubb, designer of the original *Marvel Super Heroes RPG*, will be the author of this one-shot special.

Easy to learn, easy to play, the *Dragon Strike* game is a new revolution in role-playing, as well as an excellent starting point for individuals to this amazing and enjoyable form of gaming.

— Jeff Grubb

More than just a video, the *Dragon Strike* tape is filmed in hyperReality.™

AdventureVision, Dungeons & Dragons, D&D, Dragon Strike, Dragon Master, hyperReality, and the TSR logo are all trademarks of TSR, Inc.

stan's SOAP BOX

Hi, Heroes,

Listen up, gang, because I'm about to generously increase your fund of knowledge with two new items!

ITEM #1: We've received lots of mail asking why I gave up writing RAVAGE, one of Marvel's great new 2099 titles. Although I've no way of knowing if the letter writers are unhappy I've stopped scripting the mag, or are writing to me because they're overjoyed that I've given it up, here's the scoop. . .

You know I've been toiling out here in the "every-man-for-himself" jungle of Hollywood for the past few years. Some months ago, I had some spare time on my hands and, when MARVEL 2099 came along, welcomed the chance to write a new monthly series again. But, no sooner did I get caught up in the wonderful experience of creating a new fictional world for an exciting new super hero, then things began to heat up with Marvel's many movie projects!

Just my luck! By the time I finished scripting RAVAGE #7, I realized I'd never be able to deliver #8 to editor Joey Cavalieri in time. All at once, the many movie and TV projects we had been working on were starting to jell, and it was necessary for me to stay on top of them. Obviously, it wouldn't be fair to devote only part of my time to an important new comic book. So, sad of soul and heavy of heart, I relinquished the reins of RAVAGE.

I'd tell you more, but it's hard to write with tears stinging my eyes, so let's tackle our next surprising topic. . .

ITEM #2: The title is RIFTWORLD — "CROSSOVER!"

You're probably saying to yourself, the title of what? Well, I'm glad you asked. And remember, you're the first to learn of this breathtaking new development, because this is the first detailed announcement to appear in print! RIFTWORLD will eventually be a new Marvel comic book series, but, for now, it's the first of a new series of paperback books published by Roc Science Fiction, a division of Penguin Books. And here's something you didn't suspect. The full title of the series is — STAN LEE'S RIFTWORLD! So, how come I had the time to do this but not RAVAGE? Listen up. I'll tell you.

A friend of mine, publisher Byron Preiss, asked me to create and write a new pocketbook series. When I told him I'd like to but didn't have time, he made it easy for me. "Just come up with the idea for a series," sayeth he. "We'll get a top science fiction writer to collaborate with you."

Though I'd never done anything like that before, it sounded exciting, so I teamed up with the brilliant Bill McKay, whose STAR TREK novelization has been on the *New York Times* best-seller list. Man, oh man, Bill was one sensational collaborator!!

In a nutshell, RIFTWORLD is a fast-moving fantasy adventure centering around (get this!) a comic book publishing company which specializes in super heroes! One night a rift opens up between our dimension and another mysterious universe. Two strange super heroes, with awesome powers, enter our world through that rift. But one particular thing bothers our hero, Harry Sturdley — are they really super heroes, or are they the greatest menace the world has ever known? And, if they were able to reach Earth, how many others are following?

Well, that's just for starters. But I promise you this — if you want a really cool book, filled with startling surprises and demonical humor, latch onto RIFTWORLD. It should be going on sale any day now! And, to help you remember, I've included a rough version of the cover. . .

Or, as Happy Harry Sturdley himself might say, "Ne quid nimis!"

Excelsior!

Stan Lee

Heavy

Second Flight

What's that old expression they use for daylight savings time? Spring *forward*, Fall *back*. Well, that might just apply to the hard-hitting, action-packed line of creator-owned books from Epic know as the "Heavy Hitters."

In May, Epic made a bold step *forward* in the genre of action adventure comics with such Heavy Hitter titles as LAWDOG, DRAGON LINES, UNTAMED, FEUD, SPYKE, and THE TROUBLE WITH GIRLS. This fall Heavy Hitters are *back* with several new titles designed to have all the gun-totin', face-first-through-the-windshield action of the previous titles and more!

Heavy Hitters, Second Flight will count among its ranks:

LAWDOG GRIMROD
Written by Chuck Dixon
Illustrated by Hoang Nguyen and Bob Downs
Cover by Flint Henry

Deep space is the setting for this, the first crossover in the Heavy Hitters' Universe. Lawdog is on the heels of telepathic alien who is calling for his help. Grimrod (of ALIEN LEGION) is trying to figure out why the Bospor at the helm of this titanic ship just busted through several barriers in Legion territory. As readers might guess, Lawdog and Grimrod's first acquaintance is not a peaceful one. As writer Chuck Dixon explained, "When Lawdog and Grimrod meet they take an instant dislike to one another. And in grand Marvel fashion, they fight — until they realize that they're up against a common enemy."

And just who or what is that enemy? Well, Chuck would rather keep that mysterious for now, but, "They're up against an enormous enemy. . . His ship is so huge that the Peacemaker (Nomad's Squadron's ship) could fit inside."

Asked if doing more Heavy Hitter crossovers in the future would appeal to him, Chuck answered with a resounding "yes" and added, "I think the intriguing thing about the Lawdog/Grimrod crossover is that you get to see (a more recent character) Lawdog from a more familiar character's point of view."

Editor Marc McLaurin gave his view as to why this pairing of characters is a perfect addition to the Heavy Hitters line. "Lawdog/Grimrod gets together two of the heaviest hitters in the lot. Both are regularly written by Chuck Dixon, (also writer for *Batman* and THE PUNISHER) who knows how to write the best raw-edged characters. This is the ultimate adventure in space or time."

BRATS BIZARRE
Written by Pat Mills and Tony Skinner
Illustrated by Duke Mighten

When the government developed the "Superkind," they didn't figure on a renegade faction of teenage super heores known as *Brats Bizarre*. The team members are: **Blades West**, who can control her atomic structure and therefore expel beams of heat and light — a powerful weapon if only she can keep from lighting herself on fire. **Bebe Segal**, who can regenerate her organs: arms, legs, etc., and by reducing her body weight to zero can take to the air. **Tyrone** is the leader of the Brats, who can create a vacuum. This ability enables him to fly by having the wind pressure pull him forward. Tyrone has a problem, though, something akin to autism. He can't relate emotionally to anyone, including his fellow Brats. **Dillinger** is the most mysterious of the bunch because he can't speak, but he has a vibrating power that can pull buildings apart. **Ocean Bacall** can control the shape of water. Although beautiful, she has a tendency to dribble at the mouth. **Valentino** is a half-man, half-animal creature whose great speed is his power. And finally there is **Largo**, strong, insolent and stupid with a Napolean complex to boot.

"Brats Bizarre is the way super heroes would be if they existed in real life," writer Pat Mills explained. "They aren't interested in stopping

HEAVY HITTERS EPIC COMICS

Hitters

bank robbers or holding up falling bridges — they just want to have fun."

Sometimes the "fun" the Brats have is at the expense of others. But Pat defends their over zealous behavior, chalking it up to the immaturity and the self-centered nature of adolescence. "They're not really bad, they like to indulge themselves selfishly. "In many ways they symbolize freedom. . . There's an element of Wayne's World about the Brats," he explained.

His writing partner, Tony Skinner, concurred. "There's an undertext that communicates that good behavior isn't necessarily moral or ideological. The Brats have an innocent naivete in them — they are not monsters. Rather, there's a brutal innocence about them."

The artwork for BRATS BIZARRE is by Duke Mighten, whose quirky style has been turning heads on Marvel UK's popular series WILD THING.

SACHS AND VIOLENS
Written by Peter David
Illustrated by George Perez

When model J.J. Sachs's friend is violently murdered, J.J. wants some answers. With the help of longtime friend and photographer Ernie Shultz (nicknamed Violens), they go toe to toe with the underbelly of society. And they love it!

"J.J. Sachs is a danger junkie," SACHS AND VIOLENS writer Peter David said. "The first time she finds herself in a precarious situation she finds it to be an unbelievable high. It turns her on." Her partner, Ernie Shultz, is in love with her, but J.J. is ambivalent to his affection. Ernie has a violent side of his personality which he hates about himself. But when he lets that part of him out by beating up on the dregs of society, the pair end up in bed. "It becomes a question of just how far he's willing to go for it," Peter said.

"People often speak about sex and violence in the same breath as if they were related, when they don't seem to have anything to do with each other. In fact, it's interesting that people seem to have more tolerance for the latter. People get more upset about sex than violence, when violence is the act of taking a life and sex is for the purpose of creating life, or one of the purposes anyway," he added.

"J.J. Sachs is a danger junkie."

How does the mature-audience SACHS AND VIOLENS contribute to the other Heavy Hitter titles? "On a basic level, it's people with big guns," Peter said. "But if you look deeper, SACHS AND VIOLENS will make people view sleazier aspects of society, like pornography and drugs. It hits you where you live."

"SACHS AND VIOLENS is an experiment in the First Amendment," Marie Javins said. "It has all the action and adventure common to the Heavy Hitters line, but it also stretches the limits of acceptability."

According to Marie, S and V also expresses a popular attitude toward women in the media today. "It's about a strong woman taking on the sleaze of society and taking control of her own destiny. Sure, Sachs is a nude model, but she does it on her own terms; it's her choice. She takes nothing from any man."

TERRARISTS
Written by Pat Mills and Tony Skinner
Illustrated by John Erasmus

In the next Heavy Hitters project, Pat Mills and Tony Skinner again display their unique vision, this time in the book TERRARISTS, where the Heavy Hitting is done by Mother Earth herself.

In a not too distant future, people are suddenly being empowered as super heroes by something called the Terran Directive. "This Terran Directive is the Earth rebelling and taking control — fighting back against all the abuse that has been done to it by human kind," Pat Mills said. By doing this, the Earth hopes her new heroes will aid her in the battle against the unconscionable destruction of the environment. But four of the newly empowered humans uncover a government plot that will exploit these new "Terrarists" and lay the Earth to waste while a select few safely colonize Mars.

Again, the punch that this Heavy Hitter delivers comes from the strong message. "Terrarists has a lot of do with the Living Earth Principle, which states that the Earth is a living organism," Pat explained. "In Terrarists we ask the question, Who are the real criminals and what are the real crimes being committed?" Tony Skinner said. "It's also a real good action story. The action is accentuated by the fully-painted rendering by John Erasmus.

Editor David Wohl summed it up: "Terrarists deals with a real life issue. It's something that affects me, my children, and everyone. That's what makes it a Heavy Hitter."

BINARY DEEP
Written by Chuck Dixon
Illustrated by Quique Alcatena

This book is designed to please longtime ALIEN LEGION fans and new followers of the Heavy Hitters line alike. In "Binary Deep" Torie Montroc must save his father, Guy, from a certain death. Guy, who ALIEN LEGION faithfuls will remember, is in suspended animation, will certainly die if forced to leave that state. But a Galactor Tribunal is trying to indict the elder Montroc for the destruction of Combine IV, the planet featured in ALIEN LEGION "Tenants of Hell." Torie must return to the decimated computer world of Ophides to retrieve the information necessary to clear his father.

"This story is real satisfying for me," Chuck said, "because it allows me to deal with events that went on in the early years of Alien Legion. The Legion must return to a computer world that years ago was destroyed when Nhakira and Tamara invaded their programs. . . As a result there are many emotional and physical consequences to deal with."

Chuck feels that although there is plenty of action in this book, as dramatically rendered by artist Quinque Alcatena, there is an underlying message. "('Binary Deep') also asks the question, Are we relying too much on computers to get things done?"

"Alien Legion has the longest history of all the Heavy Hitters titles," Editor Marc McLaurin exclaimed, "so it's drawing on a continuity to tell a story that couldn't be told in the other books." It is this familiarity that gives the Heavy Hitter some depth and complexity. Marc continued, "'Binary Deep' pulls together events and characters from the past ten years to tell the ultimate story of camaraderie, death and danger.

DRAGON LINES:
THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR
Written by Peter Quinones
Illustrated by Ron Lim
and Jim Sanders III

Where DRAGON LINES left off, DRAGON LINES: THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR picks up with more great Heavy Hitting Kung Fu action. This time the story centers around Tao, the son of an immortal who has a great potential for power. "The Dragon Lines are like 'the force' in Star Wars," Editor David Wohl explained. "It's like a flow of energy around the Earth that some people can tap into to gain power." Many people have designs on Tao and without direction he could end up on the bad side of that power. With good intentions Li, the Monkey King, and the Spirit Boxer (both of whom fans of the first series will remember) go to Hong Kong to guide him.

David explained why this is an excellent sequel to the original, and why it adds to the Heavy Hitters line. "We're pushing the envelope of the action genre. DRAGON LINES was a success because it beautifully blended martial arts, mystery, and super hero action. DRAGON LINES: THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR carries that further with loads more Kung Fu action. And Ron Lim loves to draw Kung Fu action. Plus, there's more character development this time 'round. Tao, for instance, is a fine new character."

HEAVY HITTERS ANNUAL
Featuring the work of Chuck Dixon, Mike Baron, Gerard Jones and Will Jacobs, Bill Reinhold, Mark Nelson, Carl Potts, Bret Blevins, Mark Badger, Guique Alcatena and more.

Rounding out the second flight of Heavy Hitters projects, readers get a new taste of the first flight. The first ever H.H. ANNUAL features the first (well, simultaneously first, with LAWDOG/GRIMROD) crossover between Heavy Hitters titles. Lawdog is after an interdimensional villain named Jaeglom, who threatens to tear apart the fabric of reality in the worlds of Lester Girls, Spyke, Feud, Alien Legion. In five 12-page story arcs the results of Jaeglom's machinations are played out.

So, in addition to expanding the number of titles included in the explosive Heavy Hitters team, the second flight more tightly draws together the quirky and unpredictable players in the Epic Comics universe.

WARMAN
Written by Chuck Dixon
Illustrated by Juan Zanatto
Covers by Liam Sharp

"WARMAN is a bare knuckled adventure story. It's *Die Hard* in the jungle, essentially." So said PUNISHER writer Chuck Dixon (or, as he is now called, "King of the Heavy Hitters"). When gun runner Griffin's plane is shot down somewhere over the Amazon Jungle, he is forced to use his own weapons against a drug cartel that is after a Peruvian government agent who was on his way to the United States. The agent, Valtares, is part of a committee to rid the country of the cartel's control. Now Griffin is caught between two of his own customers.

According to Chuck, the thing that gives this Heavy Hitter its impact is its hard-bitten, action movie-like presentation. "The story has no super heroes — it's very cinematic."

Editor Rob Tokar cites the apathetic nature of WARMAN's main character. "Griffin is a weapons dealer who has no conscience. To him war is work. It's only business. He doesn't care who he sells his wares to." By the end of the story it will be evident whether Griffin truly cares about the consequences of his actions or not.

"Griffin is a weapons dealer who has no conscience. To him war is work."

Heavy Hitters Trivia Contest

Heavy Hitters readers will have the chance to win a rare, special metallic-cover edition of SACHS & VIOLENS #1 by Peter David and George Perez.

Each of twenty three Heavy Hitters releases slated for September-December will feature a different special bound-in trading card, and each month those cards will include a different trivia question for readers to answer. Participants must be 17 years old or older, and must write the answers, numbered 1 through 4, on an 8½ × 11 piece of paper, and send them to **Heavy Hitters Trivia Contest**, Marvel/Epic Comics, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016.

All entries must be postmarked by March 3, 1994, and received by April 10. Winners will be notified by mail.

Full details for participation will be attached to the cards.

BIKER MICE FROM MARS

This September, Marvel will introduce Biker Mice from Mars, a comic book based on the upcoming Marvel Productions' syndicated television cartoon by the same name. The Biker Mice are Vinnie, Throttle, and Modo, three heavy-metal-loving motorcyclists whose exist mainly to have fun.

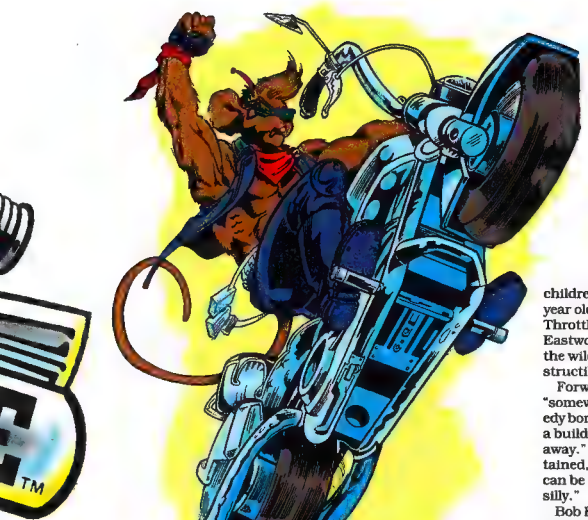
When Mars is devastated by ecological terrorists, however, the good times stop rolling. The Mice flee and head for Earth, but when they get here, they discover that their new home is the terrorists' next target. Determined to fight back, the Mice wage battle against a host of offbeat villains: Grease Pit, Dr. Karbunkle, Limburger, and the X-Terminator.

The Biker Mice from Mars television show, scheduled to premiere during prime time early this fall, is the brainchild of Rick Ungar, a former writer and producer of TV's *Totally Hidden Video* and *America's Cutest Kids*. Ungar says that the concept for the cartoon was inspired by the realization that both children and grown-ups love motorcycles. "And," he said, "I wanted to make the first Heavy Metal Rock 'n Roll cartoon." Biker Mice cartoon writer Bob Forward, whose credits include *He-Man*, *She-Ra*, and the *Captain Planet* pilot, agreed, mentioning the cartoon's "hard rock and roll" soundtrack and biker lingo. "The tone of the show is entertainment, action, and a lot of fun. The title alone made me want to work on it." Forward was also impressed by Ungar's commitment to his original vision. "He's very adamant about

> "I wanted to make the first Heavy Metal Rock 'n Roll cartoon."

what he wants. His whole idea is to make *[Biker Mice]* fun and exciting, but fun without being too weird and too deep."

To ensure that the comic remains true to Rick Ungar's concept, Editor Mort Todd signed Ungar and Forward to write the first three issues. "The book will be more cyberpunk than the TV show, but if you like the show, you'll love the comic," he said. Todd, editor-in-chief for five years of the *Cracked* humor magazine, described the Biker Mice book as "grim



with laughs."

According to Ungar, the comic will be "edgier" than the television show. "The Biker Mice cartoon is edgy, but not as edgy as the comic book. There's a lot of wise guy humor in the comic; it's grimmer than the show. It'll be more entertaining to an older reader. You'll see the difference in the animation."

make the first Rock 'n Roll

Penciler Rurik Tyler, who is known to Marvel readers for his work on Darkhold and the Midnight Sons "Siege of Darkness" crossover, said that penciling a comic based on this animated series was a pleasure. "The advantage to working on a comic based on a cartoon is that it translates from one medium to the other really easily." Tyler, whose first love is coming up with ideas for toys (the *Monster in My Pocket* figurines he designed for Matchbox sell briskly here and in Europe), summed up his experience on *Biker Mice*, compared to some of the grimmer art he has done for other comics, this way: "Humor and horror are related because they're both things that happen to other people, whether it's a pie in the face or a knife in the back. Biker Mice is a very gritty kid's thing. The team that designed the television show did a top job."

Rick Ungar credits the art department at Marvel Productions for the look of the cartoon. "I had an idea in my head about what the characters should look like, and [designer] Phil Felix made them a lot better." The development of Modo and Throttle's appearances came pretty easily, but Vinnie's was more difficult. "Vinnie transformed a lot from where he was to where he is. Kids responded well to Throttle and Modo, but not to Vinnie." The design team went back to the drawing board and came back with a new Vinnie that children liked. "Vinnie will probably prove to be the most popular now," Ungar said.

As the father of boys aged three and ten, Bob Forward can attest to the likeability of the characters. "My three year old adores Modo, the big tough one who's gentle with small children and animals, but my ten year old likes Throttle and Vinnie. Throttle is the reasonable Clint Eastwood leader-type, and Vinnie's the wild one, who thinks he's indestructible, as teenagers do."

Forward said that the cartoon is "somewhat realistic," while the comedy borders on the absurd. "We drop a building on people, but they walk away." The action scenes, he maintained, are dramatic, although they can be "comedic without being silly."

Bob Forward offered observations about his first attempt at writing comic books. "It's an enjoyable medium," he said. "You can have great lapses in narrative that you can't have when writing for television. You can have a person starting a sentence as they're running to catch a plane and finishing it as they get off in London or somewhere, and it doesn't bother anybody."

Citing *Biker Mice* as the most satisfying project he's ever worked on, Bob Forward said, "These guys may be saving the world, but they're having the best time doing it."

• Rick Ungar •

Mark's REMARKS

"You Mark Gruenwald?"

"Yeah? Who're you?" I asked the two burly men in cheap suits and Ray-Ban mirrored glasses who walked into my Park Avenue office unannounced.

"We'll do the asking, Mr. Gruenwald.

"Are you the guy who killed Mirage, Hellrazor, Shellshock, Bird-Man, Cyclone, the original Ringer, the Grappler, the Cheetah, the Vamp, Commander Kraken, Letha, Steeplejack, Mind-Wave, the Rapier, Turner D. Century, and the Hijacker all in a single story?"

"Uh...Not exactly. That was Scourge, a villain I concocted. I wrote the story, though. . .but give me a break, that was what? seven or eight years ago! The statute of limitations on that crime is up. Hey, who are you guys — the Feds?"

The two looked at one another and each made a half smirk. I really hate half smirks. The bigger of the two said, "You also killed —" (he flicked open a small black notebook) "— the Porcupine, Blue Streak, Death Adder, Occult, Left-Winger, Right-Winger, Tom Thumb, Black Archer, Nighthawk II, Blue Eagle, Nuke, Foxfire, Lamprey, Redstone, Inertia, Cutthroat, Snapdragon, Mangler, Deathstroke, Maelstrom, Quasar's father, and several Scourges?"

I was exasperated now. "Yeah, over the course of my writing career so far, there've been a few casualties. Every writer takes a few out of the pool. What of it? I've added more than I subtracted!"

"Yeah, sure, every writer kills off a few in their time. Stan and the original Baron Zemo. Conway and Gwen Stacy. Claremont and Phoenix. DeMatteis and Kraven. But you, Mr. Gruenwald, you far exceed the norm."

"Yeah," sneered the bigger one, "even Starlin, Mr. Infinity Crusade himself, who once had the reputation for killing every one of his characters before leaving a series, has since brought almost all of them back. That makes you Marvel's Mister Death, mister!"

"So you want I should bring back Bird-Man? Steeplejack? Turner D. Century? Get real. That's it. I've had enough of your line of questioning. I'm getting my secretary to throw you out! JO-SIEEEEEE!"

They slammed the door before my yelp for help could fully escape. The bigger one put his hand on my shoulder and sat me down hard in my swivel chair. As he sat on the edge of my desk, he removed his Ray-Bans, leaned in and said, "Look, Mr. Gruenwald, we're not with the Feds. We don't even wanna know where you were the night Superman bought the farm —"

"Hey, I don't go near that universe! That was my ex-assistant Mike Car—!" He clamped his meaty hand over my moustache.

The other one said, "We have a client, who prefers at this time to go unnamed, who is interested in, shall we say, eliminating a character who has outlived his usefulness. Since you've had more experience than anybody else in the field wiping out known, named characters, he wants to hire you as — how can I put this delicately? — the triggerman? He's willing to pay you the tidy sum of —"

"Wait a minute!" I interjected. "You want to hire me as a hit man?!? I don't do that anymore! I'm out of that line of work! I've reformed! I regret almost every death I've ever committed to print! I —"

"Don't con a con artist, Mr. Gruenwald," the man on the other side of my desk said. "You're responsible for two deaths in the past year alone — Cutthroat and Snapdragon. Don't tell me you've sworn off!"

"Well," I admitted, "occasionally, for dramatic necessity or long-term character development I still have to — ahem — write out certain characters, but I'm no longer the advocate of wholesale housecleaning. I believe that every character, no matter how humble his origins, may be of use to some writer or another, so I have no right to retire that character from the character pool we all share!"

"Rationalize it how you wish, Mr. Gruenwald," said the man. "What we want to know is if you want the job or not."

"Um. . .who's the character?" I asked. There are, after all, still a few characters in the mighty Marvel Universe that I find aesthetically embarrassing.

"No can tell, Mr. Gruenwald, until after you accept the assignment."

"Well, then I'm just not interested in accepting your so-called assignment. Sorry."

The two looked at each other; then the big one got off the corner of my desk and joined the other at the door. As the shorter one opened it, I suddenly thought, what if the character their mysterious employer wants to eliminate is one I actually like? What if they just find some other hack to do the guy in and I don't find out about it till I get the comic? What if it's someone I really don't think should die — like an Iron Fist — and I'm haunted by not saying something to prevent it, when I had the chance?

"Wait!" I said as the first was nearly out the door. "Come back and let's talk a sec. Have a seat on my couch."

I came around my desk and closed the door as they sat on my long blue-grey couch. "Change your mind, Mr. Gruenwald?" asked the slightly smaller one.

"Possibly," I lied, leaning against the edge of my desk. "Let me ask you a few questions. I promise they won't be who your employer or who your target is, okay?" Their nondescript heads bobbed in unison.

"Okay," I said with a sigh, ready to wing it. "This character you want bumped off . . .you say he's outlived his usefulness? How so?"

The two looked at each other through their Ray-Bans and, for a moment, I figured they were going to refuse to cooperate. Then the smaller one said, "The guy's backstory has gotten way too complicated, he's been handled by a succession of writers who took the character this way and that, his sales are now in the toilet, and — to make a long story short — our employer thinks the only thing good about the character is his name. So he wants to kill the current guy so he can turn around

and recycle the name with a new character."

"I see. That does sound like a real problem. And death, as you propose, is a possible solution to that problem. Possible, I say, because you're hoping that you can do better the second time, but you're by no means assured of it.

"Actually your plight reminds me of a discussion I was involved in concerning Captain America's pal, the Falcon. I'd gotten a lot of fan mail from people who were interested in seeing Falc return to Cap's book, and so I was considering it. My problem with the Falcon was something like what you said. Through a succession of writers, Falc's backstory got very, very convoluted and messy. I also thought the way he looked was a bit too '70s-ish, and what he could do was no big shakes anymore. An

artist came in with a proposal to kill him off and have him be replaced by a young continuity-free protege in a slicked-up '90s suit.

"As I mulled over the idea, I began to realize my great affection for Sam Wilson and the storyline where he was first introduced, well before his life got all mucked up. It also hit me that he was Marvel's first African-American super hero. I couldn't condemn such a guy to death just because he had the misfortune of having some writers make him complicated instead of interesting. So I told the artist, how about if we just ignore all the stuff that makes Sam's backstory so unsavory — not negate it, mind you, just never refer to it again — and work on updating him for the '90s instead? The artist agreed, we did just that, and well, the Falcon's been back and the response to his return has been generally good."

sort of acknowledgment of my tale. Finally the big one said, "That may work with a supporting character, Mr. Gruenwald. But we're talking about a headliner here —"

The smaller guy elbowed the big one in the ribs, afraid, I guess, that he was going to reveal too much.

"Well, with a headliner, it's possible to do the same. You can just have the writer and editor hereby vow to ignore all the bad stuff and concentrate on the good, and eventually the fans will stop remembering that the bad stuff was even there."

"That won't work, Mr. Gruenwald," the smaller lug said. "We're talking about a book which is hemorrhaging from low sales. It's necessary to do something big and something quick to save it."

"'To Save You, Why Must I Kill You?'" I murmured.

"What was that?"

"Oh, I was just quoting my all-time favorite Stan Lee title. Your solution to save the title is to kill it, right?"

"Yeah, but then revive it."

"Look, one of my most-quoted axioms about the comics biz is that there are three things you can do to make an immediate sales difference on a super hero title: One, guest star somebody big, like Wolverine or Venom. Two, change a guy's costume in a big way. Or three, kill him off and/or replace him. You seem dead-set — pardon the pun — on the last of these. Have you considered the first two?"

"Considered?" said the bigger guy. "We did 'em! Even threw in number four to add to your list — did a gimmick cover. Didn't work. Soon as the guest stars left and the cover was back to normal, sales slacked back. new costume be darned."

"I see. . .well, might I suggest then retiring the character without killing him? Maybe the book's just a little anemic right now, or there's a lot of stiff competition out there, or the direction's just never clicked, and all you need is a few years of downtime so you can try again with the exact same guy. I mean, the Hulk, Silver Surfer, the Guardians of the Galaxy — none of these could sustain a series for very long when they first came out in the '60s and '70s, but after being relaunched some time later — success! Could happen with your guy."

"But what about Ghost Rider, Deathlok, and Spider-Woman?" asked the smaller one. "They were revived with new guys taking the place of the originals. They might not've done so well with originals just dusted off and put back in print."

"Mmm, yes," I said, "but for every Ghost Rider or Deathlok or Spider-Woman, you have at least two Iron Fists or Morbiuses or Hellstorms or Warlocks who are the same old characters dusted off and done better than in their previous incarnations. What I think you have to do is determine what is at the core of a given character's concept. If it is that a specific person just has to be a certain character to retain its uniqueness and primacy, or if the concept is bigger than who happened to be the first to embody it. For example, you could do another guy who got Morbius's blood formula and turned into a living vampire, but it wouldn't be Morbius. On the other hand, you could do another guy with a fiery skull riding a motorcycle — it doesn't have to be Johnny — excuse me, John — Blaze."

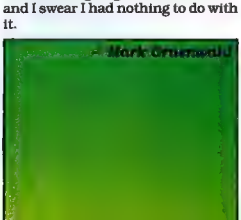
The two lugs both stared at their knees for a moment, apparently thinking about what I'd just said. "So have your employer ask himself if the concept of the character he wants to bump off requires that the original person embody that concept to make it work — replacing Sam Wilson with another Falcon would rob the Marvel Universe forever of its first African-American hero — or if it's a non-specific, inheritable concept — any woman with spidery powers could be a female Spider-Man, not just the first. Does that make sense?

The two guys in cheap suits rose from my couch. Did my arguments penetrate? Did I save the life of a character whose identity I don't even know?

"Thanks for your time, Mr. Gruenwald," the one said as the two opened the door and left my office. I stood at the door and watched them lumber down the hall toward the reception area.

"Scratch Gruenwald. Let's try Nicieza. He just had a 60-year-old granny killed."

Reader alert: Somebody with his own book is going to die real soon, and I swear I had nothing to do with it.



Ramificatio

"Bloodties"

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Imagine you're the mutant hero Quicksilver, a sonic-boom generator in the form of a man, capable of pummeling evil into submission with a dizzying barrage of hundreds of blows a second. Or suppose you're Crystal, gifted with literally inhuman command of the elements, and counted among the ranks of Earth's mightiest heroes. All that power. . . and yet, as you quite painfully discover, so little ability to guarantee the safety of your own child, the victim of an insidious kidnapping plot engineered by Fabian Cortez, the renegade Acolyte of Magneto. Does this realization plummet you into a crisis of stolen confidence? Or does it strengthen your heroic resolve, making you an even more potent threat to the villainous forces you regularly oppose?

Such is the nature of two of the many intriguing questions likely to stem from "Bloodties," this fall's hotly anticipated X-Men/Avengers crossover. A thirtieth anniversary celebration for both groups, the five-part blockbuster promises to dish up ramifications galore: the X-Men will re-examine their outlook on the mutant question, the Avengers will again reshuffle their deck, and the Avengers West Coast will walk away from the charter group altogether for want of respect.

"I think "Bloodties" will be very similar to "Galactic Storm," where you have reverberations still being felt even now," Avengers Group Editor Ralph Macchio said.

These winds of change are sent swirling by the manipulative Cortez, eager for both protection and redemption after failing to supplant Magneto. It is with these goals in mind that he abducts Quicksilver and Crystal's daughter, Luna, throwing the Avengers, the X-Men, and all of Magneto's Avalon sanctuary into a frenzy. Blinded by a volatile mix of mutual distrust and dictated by circumstance, the allied super teams and the Acolytes misguidedly go head-to-head, with Cortez, maliciously ecstatic, waiting in the wings.

Adding further fuel to the conflict, AVENGERS writer and X-Men Group Editor Bob Harras noted, a wild card is being tossed in: during the storyline, as Magneto lies psionically incapacitated by a fed-up Professor Xavier, Exodus will rise to the fore as "almost a David Koresh" cult leader figure among the Acolytes. The repercussions of this development are sure to extend well beyond the "Bloodties" conclusion, Harras said.

AVENGERS WEST COAST Editor Nel Yomtov plans to spotlight the fanatical onslaughts of Exodus and Cortez, and more importantly the AWC's response, as a catalyst for change in the California contingent.

At a crucial point in the fray, readers' eyebrows may be raised by an incident underscoring the tactical differences which have lately come to distinguish the East and West Coast squads. "The East Coast group will say, 'Look, you people are screwing up, and you're going to blow this whole operation,'" Yomtov said. "And the West Coast group will come back and say, 'You don't tell us what to do. We're in the same business you are, we just have a different approach.'".

In the episode's aftermath the Avengers East will go so far as to threaten their colleagues with probation, setting the stage for the expansion team's swan song in AVENGERS WEST COAST #102 and, one month later, their self-proclaimed rebirth in FORCE WORKS #1. "I've tried to play up certain smoldering resentment occasionally over the past couple of years, so I've always been in favor of some kind of breakup," noted exiting AVENGERS WEST COAST writer Roy Thomas, who was busy spinning off Spider-Woman into her own limited series even as he wrapped up the team book.

The AWC/Force Works redefinition will be spearheaded by the recently ailing Tony Stark, on the mend and eager to supply both armored muscle and financial backing to a unit he's convinced was always meant to stand apart. But, as Yomtov noted, Iron Man's return must inevitably carry implications of its own.

"When Tony makes it clear he wants to come back and formulate the new mode of operation for this new group, Rhodey (Stark's estranged partner, a.k.a. War Machine) leaves," Yomtov said. "And then Rhodey literally — the next month — walks into his own series."

Staying on to join Force Works will be U.S. Agent, Spider-Woman, and, as team leader, the Scarlet Witch. Wanda's role with the group could create an interesting new irony in the Marvel Universe: while disdainful of the Avengers for their shabby treatment of the AWC, she may remain tied to them through her love for brother Pietro, who Harras hinted will rise to the occasion in "Bloodties" and become a possible candidate for a new Avengers chair. An all-new fifth member of the Force Works group is currently in the developmental stage.

If Quicksilver does in fact leave X-Factor to rejoin his former team, it will be as part of a drastically revamped Avengers lineup, one which might in some ways be more appropriately tagged the "Mighty Nasty Avengers."

In the crossover's wake, "a significant part of the team as it is now will be written out in a semi-tragic way, and the Avengers will have to deal with that and find replacements," Harras revealed. Characters being considered as permanent additions to the new, harder-edged cast the writer envisions include the Swordsman, Magdalene, and the Shi'ar emissary Deathcry, herself a product of "Galactic Storm" crossover ramifications.

Whatever the new membership, "it's going to make the split a little more apparent between what the Avengers used to be and what they are now," Harras promised.

In keeping with this shifting heroic code, the Avengers will abandon their long-recognized United Nations Charter. The move is to be prompted by the U.N.'s reluctant "Bloodties" edict that the team must give peace- keeping matters priority over "family business," no matter how grave.

"I think losing the charter is actually a good thing for the group," Harras said. "And it will fit if we bring in characters like Deathcry and Magdalene. You don't necessarily trust these people just because they joined the Avengers."

Among those slated to depart as the crossover and current key storylines wind down are Sersi and the Black Knight. With Harras and other creative principals working to affirm the title "Bloodties," "the Knight is going to see that Crystal and Pietro really do belong together, that they really are a couple, even though they don't know it. He'll realize there's nothing there for him and that it's best to step out," Harras said.

Finally resolving his feelings for Crystal, Dane Whitman will turn his attention toward Sersi in startlingly dramatic fashion — "a real heart-tugger soap opera type of thing," Harras summed up.

e Avengers/X-Men Crossover

The overly emotional might want to keep those hankies at the ready for crossover-related developments in the X-titles. According to UNCANNY X-MEN scripter Scott Lobdell, "Bloodties" may inspire Cyclops and Jean Grey to take a *significant* step forward in their oft-tested relationship, their hope for the future brightened by the spirit of cooperation displayed between Earth's mightiest heroes and its mightiest mutants.

In several individual cases, Lobdell said, "the X-Men now, more than ever, realize the validity of Xavier's dream of a better world for both mutants and humans, that a day will come when the two races will be able to tolerate each other and prosper through each other's strengths.

"Which is a good thing," he added slyly, "because with the addition of a [surprise] new member right after the crossover, the X-Men's beliefs may be shaken to their foundations."

Of course, the X-Men's corner of the Marvel Universe is complex territory, rife with differing viewpoints among its characters — not to mention its chroniclers. X-MEN writer Fabian Nicieza noted that, while the events of "Bloodties" may be seen in a positive light by some of the team, Beast and others will come away noticeably disheartened. In the adjectiveless title, at least, it may not be long before the cracks begin to show.

"My outlook on this is a little less optimistic than Scott's, because, well, I'm less of an optimist," Nicieza said with a laugh.

"These characters are very tired and beaten and battered," he continued. "It's like they're in the eighth round of a ten-round fight, and they've hit the canvas a lot. One of the questions I'm going to raise is how much longer they'll be able to lift themselves back up again."

"Bloodties" crossover guide

Part One: AVENGERS #368
Writer: Bob Harras
Penciler: Steve Epting
Inker: Tom Palmer
Editor: Ralph Macchio
Format: Standard
Price: $1.25
Pages: 32
On sale: Sept. 21

Part Two: X-MEN #26
Writer: Fabian Nicieza
Penciler: Andy Kubert
Inker: Matt Ryan
Editor: Bob Harras
Format: Standard
Price: $1.25
Pages: 32
On Sale: Sept. 21

Part Three: AVENGERS WEST COAST #101
Writer: Roy Thomas
Penciler: Dave Ross
Inker: Tim Dzon
Editor: Nel Yomtov
Format: Standard
Price: $1.25
Pages: 32
On Sale: Oct. 5

Part Four: UNCANNY X-MEN #307
Writer: Scott Lobdell
Penciler: John Romita, Jr.
Inker: Dan Green
Editor: Bob Harras
Format: Standard
Price: $1.75
Pages: 48
On Sale: Oct. 5

Part Five: AVENGERS #369
Writer: Bob Harras
Penciler: Steve Epting
Inker: Tom Palmer
Editor: Ralph Macchio
Format: Special — Platinum foil embossed cover
Price: $2.95
Pages: 48
On Sale: Oct. 19

HERO CAPS

You can trade 'em. Collect 'em. Play 'em. Keep 'em.

What are they?

They're MARVEL HERO CAPS based loosely on "pogs," the hottest new Hawaiian craze to hit the mainland, and they're infiltrating comics specialty shops for as far as the eye can see!

When Haleakala Dairies of Maui started decorating its Passion Orange Guava drink bottle tops with distinctive art, it spawned the acronym POGs and became an immediate craze. Since then, these silver dollar-sized cardboard caps have become a popular game, as well.

This summer, Marvel Comics introduces to the comic book direct sales market MARVEL HERO CAPS, a series of game disks that sport popular Marvel heroes and villains, the rationale being that comics, a visual medium from the get-go, naturally lends itself to the POGs phenomenon!

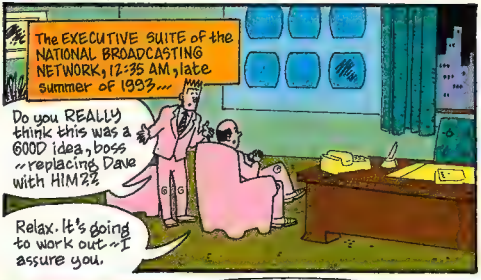
They will be released as follows:

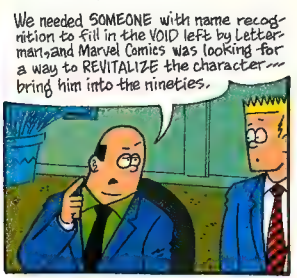
Mid-June	X-MEN by Andrew Wildman X-MEN ADVENTURES by Frank Brunner
Mid-July	SPIDER-MAN by Mark Bagley & Randy Emberlin AVENGERS by Neal Adams
Mid-August	THE BIG GUNS by Mike Zeck THE MIDNIGHT SONS by James Fry

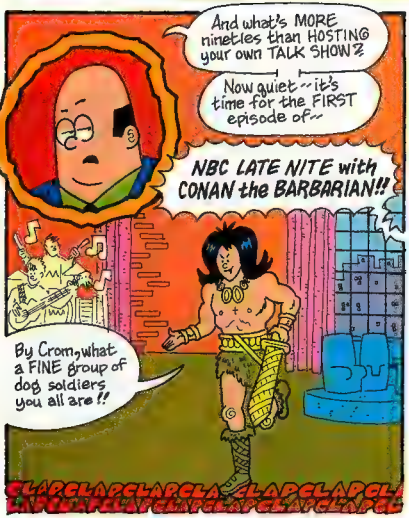
MARVEL HERO CAPS come as cardboard sheets with punched-out disks, specially shrink-wrapped. Included are nine caps per set and instructions on how to play the game. To play, fans must stack the caps art-side-up on a flat surface. The first player picks a cap up and hits the stack with it, then keeps any caps that fall art-side-up. Any caps that turn up "tails" are restacked for the next player. Participants play until there are no more HERO CAPS, then restack and play again!

As an added bonus, some hero caps featuring select characters will be randomly foil-stamped on their backs, to add to the quality and value of the package! Fans can look for MARVEL HERO CAPS in June, July, and August with a retail price of $3.99 per package.

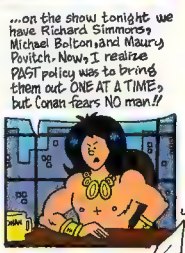
HEMBECK

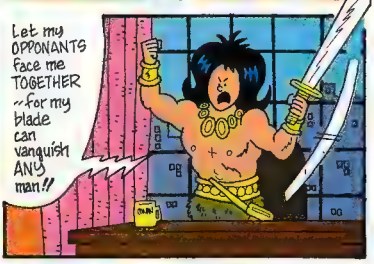

The EXECUTIVE SUITE of the NATIONAL BROADCASTING NETWORK, 12:35 AM, late summer of 1993...
Do you REALLY think this was a GOOD idea, boss --replacing Dave with HIM??
Relax. It's going to work out--I assure you.


We needed SOMEONE with name recognition to fill in the VOID left by Letterman, and Marvel Comics was looking for a way to REVITALIZE the character--- bring him into the nineties.

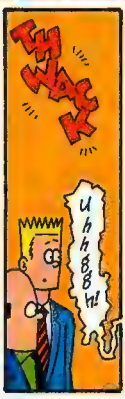

And what's MORE nineties than HOSTING your own TALK SHOW?
Now quiet--it's time for the FIRST episode of--
NBC LATE NITE with CONAN the BARBARIAN!!
By Crom, what a FINE group of dog soldiers you all are!!
CLAPCLAPCLAPCLA CLAPCLAPCL

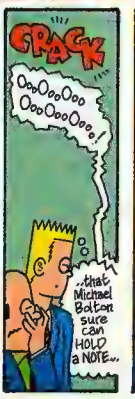
--well, the monolog went relatively smoothly, though that comedy bit about the Hyborian ale merchants seemed to be OVER the audiences head...
THAT can be FIXED. The IMPORTANT thing is how he HANDLES the GUESTS. Let's watch...


...on the show tonight we have Richard Simmons, Michael Bolton, and Maury Povitch. Now, I realize PAST policy was to bring them out ONE AT A TIME, but Conan fears NO man!!

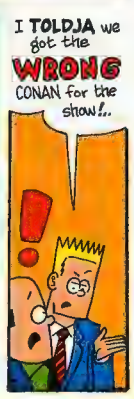

Let my OPPONENTS face me TOGETHER --for my blade can vanquish ANY man!!

"OPPONENTS"? Didn't he mean to say "BLUES"--
SWACK
Arrgh!


THWACK
Uhhggh!


CRACK
OOoOOoOOo OOoOOoOOo!
..that Michael Bolton sure can HOLD a NOTE...

That's our show for tonight! HAIL MITRA!


I TOLDJA we got the WRONG CONAN for the show!..

Hot Sheet

QUOTE OF THE MONTH — "GAMBIT? Why, next to DEADPOOL, GAMBIT is my favorite limited series!" Suzanne Gaffney, X-Editor

HOT READER OF THE MONTH — This month's "Hot Reader Letter of the Month" comes all the way from Spain, and has earned my gratitude for putting another title on my personal "must read" list. Our correspondent's name is Guillermo Segui Lopez, he lives in Valencia, Spain, and he writes:

"After reading your request for letters recommending ongoing Marvel or Epic series to other people, I write this letter to let people know that there is a comic I enjoy reading month after month — a comic that always surprises me, a comic that is unlike any other.

That comic is NOMAD.

Who would have thought that a second-rate super hero like Nomad would be able to reach first place on my list?

Fabian Nicieza's work in this comic is outstanding. Nomad is no longer a 'Bucky' (Captain America's sidekick), but a man who cares about people and who fights everyday problems. In NOMAD, Fabian addresses real problems like AIDS, racial discrimination, poverty, street gangs. . . He studies the problem and gives us his point of view about it. The stories are well written, and I can feel that Fabian has done a lot of research before writing them — a feeling that I experienced only once before, when Terry Austin was writing about blindness in the pages of CLOAK AND DAGGER.

What else can I say? Just give NOMAD a try. You won't be disappointed."

TWO FOR THE GOOD OF THE PLANET

Take a few deep breaths next time you're outside, and cherish that you can do so now, because if the predictions made in both the animated series turned comic BIKER MICE FROM MARS and the Epic Heavy Hitter series TERRARISTS come to pass, then fresh air will be on the extinction, list along with the rest of the planet's ecosphere. Both titles, which will premiere in September, take a different approach to pointing out a serious problem, namely the ever-decreasing health of Earth's biosphere.

In BIKER MICE, written by TV scripters Rick Ungar (the series creator) and Bob Forward, and drawn by Rurik (DARKHOLD) Tyler, readers are given a funny animal approach to environmental issues. The series stars several tough-neck Harley-riding rodents from another planet who take up Earth's plight against pollution. Shawn Banzt was excited by the prospect of BIKER MICE FROM MARS and pointed out that, in addition to being topical, "This book looks *funny*. In fact, from what I've seen, this series looks to be funnier than a certain outerspace rabbit and a group of teenage mutant ninja amphibians."

TERRARISTS, on the other hand, takes a less tongue-in-cheek approach to the problems facing this planet. The series definitely has a hard edge to it and an important story to tell. TERRARISTS is written by Pat Mills and Tony Skinner of PUNISHER 2099 fame and beautifully painted by artist John Erasmus, and tells the story of a pollution control vigilante force. Those who have seen the work on TERRARISTS are confident that the stunning work it contains will catch readers' eyes and raise people's consciousness. "This new limited series features terrific art by John Erasmus," pointed out Steve Snyder of Ohio's *Central City Comics*. "His paintings really are absolutely beautiful. Plus, the future storyline by Mills and Skinner is intriguing. The story points out that it's about time the friends of the Earth take matters into their own hands."

FIVE CARD STUD

If there's one X-Man you never want to play poker with, it has got to be Gambit! Sure, Wolverine's got the original poker-face, but this feisty Cajun has always got something up his sleeve. Well, starting this October, the suave-yet-mysterious Gambit gets his own four-part limited series and you can bet that the creative team of writer Howard (GHOST RIDER) Mackie, penciler Lee (DAREDEVIL) Weeks, and inker Klaus (PUNISHER WAR ZONE) Janson will pull more than one trick out of this swaggering mutant's bag.

Since his first appearance in the pages of X-MEN a few short years ago, there has been a lot of clamor for more inside dirt on Gambit. What is he hiding? Why does Bishop mistrust him? How does the love triangle of Gambit, his now deceased wife (Belladonna), and Rogue all fit together? These are just some of the questions begging to be answered.

"Well, if there's a finer prospect for a limited series," noted Richard Stockton of Texas retail chain *Lone Star Comics*, "I haven't seen it! Hang on to your hats, *mes braves*, Marvel has just upped the ante and Gambit has a full house — a full house of fans that is! Every one of them is waiting, biting their nails until this blockbuster hits the stands. Lee Weeks's and Klaus Janson's artwork is stunning, and it is the perfect complement to Howard Mackie's tale of the mysterious underworld of New Orleans. After writing the wonderful X-Men/Ghost Rider crossover in GHOST RIDER #26 & #27, it's no surprise that Marvel entrusted him with the task of fleshing out everyone's favorite Cajun crusader."

Now, before you go thinking that anticipation for GAMBIT is a Southern states phenomenon, check out what they're saying on the West Coast as well.

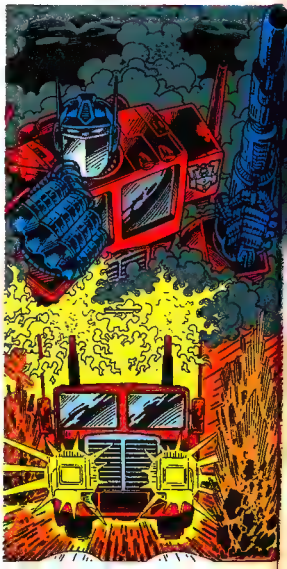
"The character Gambit is mysterious," stated Shawn Bantz of California-based comic store chain *Comics Unlimited*, "yet surprisingly popular. His past has always been shrouded in mystery, but this latest turn of events [as portrayed in the limited series] seem sto clear up questions about his identity. Howard Mackie has shown himself a brilliant writer on GHOST RIDER. . . This is going to be a masterful piece of story and art similar to the original [Claremont and Miller] WOLVERINE limited-series. . .Lee Weeks's art is superb, as fans of G.I. JOE and DAREDEVIL know. I can't wait for this series to come out."

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

They were a toy, a cartoon, a comic book — at least for a while years ago. Now, like all good things, they are set to rise again. They are the Transformers and they'll be back this September in an all-new series, TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION 2, written by Simon (ALPHA FLIGHT) Furman and drawn by Derek Yaniger. But this isn't your Dad's Transformers. Yeah, the new series will be chock-full of high-tech robots and sock 'em up action. But it'll also be filled with a lot of other things, things like intrigue, tension, and pulse-pounding adventure.

Don't worry if you're skeptical. So was former comic book editor turned marketing wizard Mike Gold of the Connecticut retail chain *Dream Factory*. "[With TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION 2] I think you've got a heck of a challenge on your hands, as this property is only slightly more relevant to the contemporary comic book reader than the hula hoop. From the preview I saw, however, Derek Yaniger's work is powerful and dynamic enough to make readers give it a closer look.

And in Simon Furman's hands, the story will be both energetic and wacky. Simon gave Death's Head a start in the pages of the original TRANSFORMERS, and if he can put that type of edge in the new series, we should have a really entertaining comic book on our hands. Given his track record, I'll bet Simon can pull it off once again."



BLAST OFF, BUCKETHEAD!!

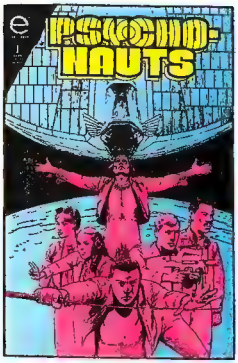
While Gambit gets the solo treatment, another member of a young hero team will also be striking out on his own: Nova of NEW WARRIORS fame! Well, come November, the NOVA ongoing series by Fabian Nicieza and Chris (SPIDER-MAN) Marrinan will give readers a monthly odyssey the man beneath the bucket-shaped helmet.

Fabian's track record for bringing out the best in the characters he writes has led to no small bit of buzz around NOVA, as noted by Richard Stockton. "The shining light of creative storytelling at Marvel has been white-hot lately, so it's no surprise that the newest miniseries is NOVA! Fabian Nicieza has hurdled from the NEW WARRORS to X-FORCE to X-MEN to CABLE, but now he returns to one of the characters that made him great. I'm thrilled to see another one of the NEW WARRIORS get a chance in the spotlight. They are one of the most underrated teams in the Marvel Universe and a NOVA miniseries is sure to bring more attention to this wonderful title."

BADDEST MAN IN THE WHOLE D**N TOWN

Something had to give. ALIEN LEGION's Grimrod rules the spaceways and LAWDOG rules the dimensional crossroads. But everybody knows that the Universe holds little room for there to be two "Baddest Dudes on the Block." So this September it'll be a "no wimps allowed" battle for supremacy when the two cross paths in LAWDOG VS. GRIMROD by writer Chuck (PUNISHER WARJOURNAL) Dixon and artists Huang (ALIEN LEGION) Ngyen and Flint (LAWDOG) Henry.

Gary Colabuono of Chicago's *Moondog's Comics* chain summed up why no one should miss this epic event. "This book defines the new 'Heavy Hitters' line from Epic," stated Gary, "— the mayhem, the heavy-duty hardware, the full-metal, rock 'em sock 'em no-holds-barred all-out action. And that just describes the art! Chuck Dixon's sure-to-be-classic tale of the cool clash between the multiverse's two biggest, baddest dudes has got to be read to be believed!"



AN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR

Finally, after you finish reading this MARVEL AGE, go back to your comic shop and pick up the first issue in what is one of the most ground-breaking series in comic book history. The book is called PSYCHONAUTS, and it is not only a must-read, because it is a compelling tale of the world on the brink of madness, but because it marks the first time that creators from all over the globe have teamed to tell such an important tale.

PSYCHONAUTS is comic book history. The series is written by Britain's Alan Grant and Tony Luke, drawn by Japan's Motofumi Kobayashi, and edited by America's Nel Yomtov, and a bit of every culture is represented in the book. PSYCHONAUTS is a comic with everything going for it, points out Richard Stockton. "It looks like a world gone mad, which is why Alan Grant is so perfect for the job of writing it. PSYCHONAUTS has all of the ingredients of the best of British, American, and Japanese visual storytelling. With artwork by Kobayashi, comic enthusiasts on both sides of the world will rejoice. The story is compelling and the first issue left me wanting more."

And "Hot Sheet" readers will have *their* desire for more satisfied next month with our next installment focusing on the Marvel 2099 Universe and a potpourri of other hot projects as recommended by a panel of experts across the nation!

Letters

Curses - Foiled Again!

Send your letters to: MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE, c/o Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016.

Attention, correspondents: All letters to be considered for publication must include your complete name and address, though we will gladly withhold that info on request!

This month's specially enhanced letter column title seems to be a perfect fit to the theme that we're "covering" this issue. It comes to us straight from Dave Sullivan of Brookline, MA. Thanks, Dave! In return, we may even print the rest of your letter in this very column — at least if you promise to behave yourself.

First, though, let's just take a second to remind everyone else out there that we still need a newer and spiffier title for this column every single month. So send 'em on in! If we use one of yours, we'll thank you right here in black and white. Or perhaps even specially embossed gold and lacquer.

In fact, we've recently received a bunch of letters that directly address the issue of specially-embossed and otherwise enhanced comic book covers. We'll get to a few of them in a minute. But first, let's deal with an even more burning issue that's probably been keeping you all up nights. . .

Dear MARVEL AGE,

I have been collecting comics for nearly fifteen years. Most of them are Marvel books. The reason I collect more Marvel Comics than others isn't because of the great stories and art that can be found in so many of your titles. No, I have been collecting Marvel Comics in the hope of finding the answer to a question I have been asking myself for years! Who in the name of Odin is Irving Forbush?!

For years, I have searched for at least a clue to the identity of this man who is often ridiculed in your art (Forbush Man in WHAT THE. . .?) and prose (Stan's Soapbox in MARVEL AGE #123). Who is he? Is he the janitor, the mailman (no, that wouldn't be right since Marvel used to be on Madison Avenue), the staff messenger? What exactly does this guy do? I was going to ask Klaus Janson when I attended his Storytelling in Comics class at the School for Visual Arts, but I forgot.

Also, say hello to that nut Hector Collazo for me. We went to high school together. Thanks!

Ivan Fred
750 53rd St.
Brooklyn, NY 11220

Who's Irving Forbush, Ivan? Maybe we can explain it this way: You know the guy who created polio vaccine, brought civilization to the Arctic, and invented the zipper? Well, that's not Irv.

'Way back in the 1960s, the good Mister Forbush first started to turn up in various letters columns, Bullpen Bulletins text pages, and what have you. When the late '60s saw the debut of Marvel's first parody comic book, NOT BRAND ECCH, ol' Honest Irv donned long underwear and a pot to become the nebbish of the super hero set, Forbush Man. Since then, the Way-Out Wonder has continued to show up periodically, most notably in semi-regular appearances in WHAT THE. . .? and several years' worth of appearances on the front and back covers of this very magazine.

As far as what Irv actually does around the Bullpen, well. . . Heck if we know. But hey, it beats paying the little bum a salary.

And now that your minds are all at ease with regard to the Forbush question, we can all sit back and get ready for our LETTER OF THE MONTH! As always, we've burrowed through our mountain of mail, looking for letters that we think will be of particular interest to Marvelites the world over.

Given this issue's focus on Marvel's use of special covers, we thought we'd take a slightly different take on the topic and publish, not one, but several of your reactions (pro and con) to enhanced covers and other such things. We'll delay making any comments of our own until the end.

Dear Marvel,

As you know, in recent months, Marvel and other comics publishers have been crowding the comics featuring variously enhanced covers, most notably and commonly the "foil-enhanced" special editions (multiple covers, holograms, embosses, and even "movement-enhanced" — a century-old gimmick — and thermographic techniques abound as well). As a Marvel devotee for more than a quarter century, I can say the most notable special effect of these enhancements is to raise the cost of a $1.25 comic book to a whopping $2.95! In some cases, the price even soars to $3.95. I have been following and collecting the adventures of Marvel's mainstream characters (as well as many not-so-mainstreamers) since practically the beginning of the Marvel Age and now find myself having to cut back on some "second-tier" books just to keep up with my long-time favorites. I have not bought into the "Midnight Sons" books, for example, and recently ALPHA FLIGHT fell off my subscription list at the comics shop. I need hardly add that I do not buy any comics from the newer publishers anymore, and even my DC list is down to a pitiful single book.

As for the aesthetic involved in these covers, I feel they detract from good art more often than enhance it (the recent FF cover was so cluttered with gloss and texture that it was nearly impossible to view as a single image). NAMOR has become a very readable book, rich in atmosphere and character, but the recent "underwater" foil stamp was a laughable fish-scale texture. Occasionally, and mostly during this fad's earliest attempts, I have enjoyed the novelty and creativity involved, such as the Silver Surfer's foil-embossed anniversary issue, but enough's enough! I would much rather see a cover that is simply well-drawn than one cluttered with expensive gift wrap. Remember John Romita's "Spider-Man No More" cover? High drama at an affordable price.

Despite various editorials to the contrary, Marvel's marketing strategy seems to pander to the "comics as collectibles" crowd. Why else have four covers for X-MEN #1 (plus a $3.50 collector's edition)? Comics are meant to be read and enjoyed, not permanently bagged for resale. The core books, such as CAPTAIN AMERICA, THOR, IRON MAN, HULK, and of course, SPIDER-MAN and FF all have interesting and creative plots and art (and hey, they're selling well, too!).

Already, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, MOON KNIGHT, SILVER SABLE, and the 2099 books are on the precipice of my subscription list. Others that I would truly hate to lose, such as DEATHLOK, CAGE, and GHOST RIDER, are in danger, as well. I believe most readers have a finite budget for comics, and with more comics out each month, I doubt the market will support these new and often worthy projects unless Marvel and the other publishers endeavor to keep the costs down by minimizing these needless expenditures.

Dave Sullivan
101 Monmouth St., #415
Brookline, MA 021146

Dear Marvel people,

I just read the MARVEL PREVIEW '93 you guys made and I must say I'm thrilled! Twenty-four annuals, 24 new characters! Being a fan of the X-teams, GENERATION X and KHAOS sound cool to me. I must also thank you for all the enhanced covers you are going to give us this year.

Best wishes for the years to come.

Antoine Orcel
45 Rue des Fosses,
Saint Denis
92700 Boulogne Billancourt
France

Dear MARVEL AGE,

I am a long-time collector of comics and have one complaint — gimmicks. The worst gimmicks of all have got to be the polybagged comics, such as the "Rise of the Midnight

The Black Panther as rendered by Alex Ross of MARVELS. More on Alex's work next issue!

Sons" and "X-Cutioner's Song" crossovers. In "Rise of the Midnight Sons," why not just insert the poster in the book so a collector doesn't feel pressured to buy two copies, one to preserve and one to read. In the "X-Cutioner's Song," what was the point of those cards? Don't you want your readers to be happy and come back for more instead of making them buy another copy of a book because of a gimmick that is not necessary?

You guys also have gimmick covers. The only ones I have, that have a great cover and great interior art and stories, are SILVER SURFER #75, FANTASTIC FOUR #371, the SPIDER-MAN anniversary issues, and the Marvel 2099 #1's.

Having cool covers on anniversary issues is fine, in my opinion. But whatever happened to the good old, no-gimmick, double-sized #1 issues? If you cut down on gimmicks, I think it will make Marvel better. You may make a little less money, but at least then I can afford next year's X-MEN crossover.

Aaron Siegel
5650 Independence Circle
Alexandria, VA 22312

Hmm. . . Looks like this is turning into quite a horse race. But before we make any repiy, let's see what one more correspondent has to say in our monthly. . .

As you know, our WAM Jam gives us the opportunity to pick up on some news and views from one of our favorite Wild Agents of Marvel. If you want to be a WAM Jammer yourself, just send us s a letter on official WAM stationery or include your WAM I.D. number along with your letter.

Dear MARVEL AGE,

I really don't care if you print this, but you must definitely read this letter. Because I am a WAM founding member, a Keeper of the Flame, and a Real Frantic One, I feel it is my duty to bring out the fact that these specially-enhanced covers are high-priced and these specially-enhanced covers seem to be on every shelf in the comic book stores. A specially-enhanced cover should be celebrating something special and the story should have good writing and lots of excitement. Furthermore, when a comic book celebrates its hundredth issue or anniversary, the comic book should try to lower the price for that one special issue. If there are more people who feel the way I do, I urge you to write to Marvel and tell them to slow down on the specially-enhanced covers.

Until THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN comes with a Spider-Man and Wolverine that pop out of the comic and into my room, make mine Marvel!

A. Hernandez
947 Main St.
Sayreville, NJ 08872

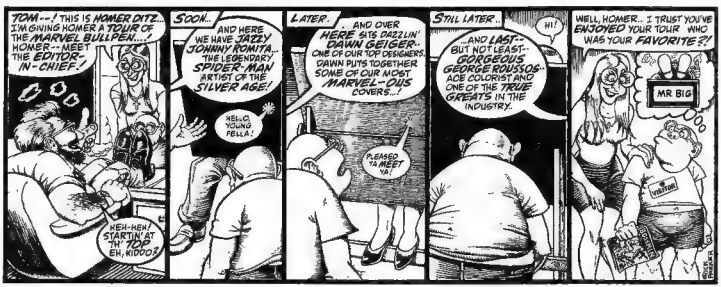
So there you have it. We think that everyone probably agrees that a specially-enhanced cover shouldn't substitute for a compelling story and good interior art, although it can be a nifty addition to one. Yet (as with any topic), once we get beyond that point, there's a range of opinions. Even among this unsolicited array of letters, we've got people who get excited about enhanced covers (like Antoine), people who could live without them (like Dave), and people who like some of the enhanced covers that we've done (such as Aaron or "A").

Trying to please everyone is not easiest thing in the world. However, unless you skipped this entire issue and jumped straight to this page, you already know that we're going to be trying an experiment this August and September. During those two months, we'll publish comic books in two editions: with and without enhanced covers. Marketing Manager Sven Larsen told us that his department will be keeping a close eye on the sales of the two editions. If both sell well, then we'll continue the practice indefinitely. That way, those people who are into specially-enhanced covers will be able to buy them, but anyone who'd rather pass will have that option as well. . .and *without* missing out on any of the stories.

Of course, as we said, the whole idea is an experiment. So please write in and let us know your reactions to the new strategy. We'd love to hear what you have to say.

See you in thirty.

THE BOSSMEN by RICK PARKER


TOM--! THIS IS HOMER DITZ... I'M GIVING HOMER A TOUR OF THE MARVEL BULLPEN... HOMER--MEET THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF!
HEH-HEH! STARTIN' AT "N" TOO EH, KIDDO?
SCOT..
AND HERE WE HAVE JAZZY JOHNNY ROMITA... THE LEGENDARY SPIDER-MAN ARTIST OF THE SILVER AGE!
HELLO, YOUNG FELLA!
LATER..
AND OVER HERE SITS DAZZLIN' DAWN GEIGER-- ONE OF OUR TOP DESIGNERS. DAWN PUTS TOGETHER SOME OF OUR MOST MARVEL-OUS COVERS...!
PLEASED TA MEET YA!
STILL LATER..
...AND LAST-BUT NOT LEAST-GORGEOUS GEORGE ROUSSOS- ACE COLORIST AND ONE OF THE TRUE GREATS IN THE INDUSTRY.
HI!
WELL, HOMER.. I TRUST YOU'VE ENJOYED YOUR TOUR WHO WAS YOUR FAVORITE?!
MR BIG
WOLVERINE
ROGER STERN
JOHN ROMITA JR.

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checklist

First Week

AVENGERS ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE 3.95

AVENGERS WEST COAST #100 3.95

BIKER MICE FROM MARS #1 1.50

CABLE #5 2.00

CAGE #20 1.25

CAPTAIN AMERICA #421 1.25
"The Faustus Affair" part 2.

CHILDREN OF THE VOYAGER #3 (of 4) 1.95

DANCES WITH DEMONS #3 1.95
A mystical vision quest.

DAREDEVIL #322 1.25
"Fall From Grace" part 3.

DARK GUARD #2 1.75
Badly wounded, Killpower fights for his life.

DARKHAWK #33 1.25

DIE CUT #1 (of 4) 2.50

GROO THE WANDERER #106 2.25
Groo gets caught in a political power struggle.

GUN RUNNER #2 (of 6) 1.75

KILLPOWER: THE EARLY YEARS #3 (of 4) 1.75

MARVEL MASTERWORKS #24 34.95

MOTORMOUTH & KILLPOWER #1 (of 4) 2.50

NAMOR #44 1.25
A special tale of a future world with polluted oceans.

NIGHTSTALKERS #13 1.75
The conclusion to "Short Circuit."

NOMAD #19 1.75
"The Faustus Affair" part 3.

ORIGINAL GHOST RIDER #17 1.75
Ghostie battles Satan & Inferno.

REN & STIMPY #12 1.75
Ren takes a stress management course.

SABRETOOTH #4 (of 4) 2.95

SACRS & VIOLENS #1 (of 4) 2.75

SAINT SINNER #2 1.75
Phillip is wanted for murder.

SHE-HULK #57 1.75

SPIDER-MAN 2099 #13 1.25

SPIDER-MAN CLASSIC #8 1.25

THOR CORPS #3 (of 4) 1.75

THUNDERSTRIKE #2 1.25

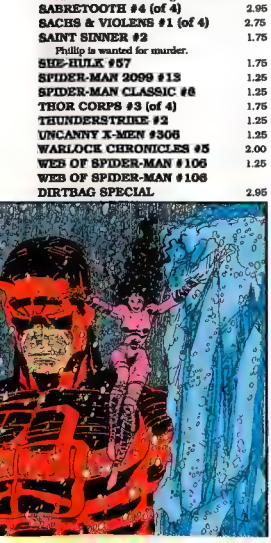
UNCANNY X-MEN #306 1.25

WARLOCK CHRONICLES #5 2.00

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #106 1.25

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #108 1.25

DIRTBAG SPECIAL 2.95



Second Week

AKIRA TPB #10 17.95

ALPHA FLIGHT #126 1.75

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #383 1.25
Spidey faces The Jury.

BARBIE #35 1.25

DARKHOLD #14 1.75
The truth about the Monstrosity.

GHOST RIDER #43 1.75

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #42 1.25
The Guardians fight to save immortal Asgard.

HEAVY HITTERS ANNUAL #1 3.75

HYPERKIND #3 1.75
A living void threatens to swallow the souls of L.A.

LAWDOG VS. GRIMROD 3.50

LETHAL FOES OF SPIDER-MAN #3 (of 4) 1.75

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #141 1.50

MORBIUS REVISITED #4 (of 5) 1.95
Morbius and Stroud face an army of vampires.

NIGHT THRASHER #4 1.75
Thrash tries to cripple Tiger's operation.

PSYCHONAUTS #2 (of 4) 4.95
The team finds the Earth ruled by dinosaurs.

PUNISHER WAR ZONE #21 1.75
"2 Mean 2 Die" part 2 of 3.

QUASAR #52 1.25

RAVAGE 2099 #12 1.25
Ravage adjusts to his feral new powers.

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #215 2.25
"Conan and the Gods of the Mountain" conclusion.

SECRET DEFENDERS #9 1.75
War Machine, Thunderstrike & the Silver Surfer join Dr. Strange.

SILVER SABLE #15 1.25

SLEEPWALKER #30 1.25
Psyko and Spectra vs. Sleepwalker.

SPIDER WOMAN #1 (of 4) 1.75

TERRARISTS #1 (of 4) 2.50

WILD THING #8 1.75
Wild Thing falls into a VR trap set by Trask.

WOLVERINE #75 3.95

WONDER MAN #27 1.25

X-FACTOR #96 1.25
Could Forge be joining the team?

X-MEN ADVENTURES #13 1.25
Introducing Bishop.

Third Week

ALIEN LEGION: BINARY DEEP 3.50

AVENGERS #368 1.25

BLOODSEED #3 (of 4) 1.95
Bloodseed discovers who his masters are.

BRATS BIZARRE #1 (of 4) 2.50

CHILLER #1 (of 2) 7.95

CONAN #274 1.25
The deadly return of the Night Cult.

CONAN SAGA #80 2.25
"Conan and the Bloodstained God."

CYBERSPACE 3000 #5 1.75

DARK ANGEL #16 1.75

DEADPOOL #4 (of 4) 2.00
Deadpool battles Slayback.

DEATH² #3 (of 4) 1.75

DIE CUT VS. G-FORCE #1 (of 2) 2.75

DOCTOR WHO #202 4.95

DOOM 2099 #11 1.25
Introducing the Neon Angel.

DRAGON LINES: THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR #1 (of 2) 2.25

ECTOKID #3 1.75
Dex is attacked by the entire Ectosphere.

EXCALIBUR #71 3.95

GENE DOGS #2 (of 4) 1.75
The Gene Dogs take on Genetix.

G.I. JOE #142 1.25

INCREDIBLE HULK #411 1.25

MARVEL AGE #130 1.25

MARVEL TALES #279 1.25
Spidey faces Firelord.

MORBIUS #15 1.75

PINHEAD VS. MARSHAL LAW: LAW IN HELL #1 (of 2) 2.95

PUNISHER #84 1.25
"Firefight," part 3 (of 3).

REN & STIMPY TPB: RUNNING JOKE 12.95

SPIDER-MAN #40 1.75

SUPER SOLDIERS #8 1.75

TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION 2 #1 2.95

WARLOCK & THE INFINITY WATCH #22 1.75

WHAT IF #55 1.25
"What if the Avengers Lost Operation: Galactic Storm?"

WOLVERINE: KILLING 5.95

X-MEN #26 1.25

X-MEN 2099 #2 1.25

SEPTEMBER SPOTLIGHT

AKIRA TPB #10 17.95
Re-presenting issues #28-30.

AVENGERS ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE 3.95
A 48-page behind-the-scenes special.

AVENGERS WEST COAST #100 3.95
64 pages, a completely red foil-embossed cover; death strikes.

DOCTOR WHO CLASSIC COMICS SUMMER SPECIAL 4.95
A never before seen, 64-page story.

EXCALIBUR #71 3.95
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GERALDINE BROOKS 5	6 LABOR DAY	ROB TOKAR 7	MARK ERICKSON 8	JOEY CAVALIERI 9	GERRY CONWAY 10	
ROBERT KEREKES 12	13	JIM NOVAK 14	GARY GITTELSOHN 15	KEITH WILLIAMS CRAIG KUNASCHK 16	DANNY FINGEROTH 17	
19	DOUG HAZLEWOOD 20	21	22	PETER DAVID KAREN CORBO PAUL RYAN PHILIP SHEEHY 23	24	DAWN GEIGER MICHAEL WOOTON 25
LOUISE SIMONSON ALYSON BRISTOL 26	BOB SHAREN 27	MICHAEL EURY JOHN BLIGH 28 ROSH HASHANAH	BRIANNE LYNCH 29	30		

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